MEANS OF CONVEYANCE: SPOKEN WORD PEDAGOGY, HIP HOP LITERACIES, AND THE CHALLENGES OF FOSTERING POETRY SPACES

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Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy
in the School of Education,
Indiana University
June 2020

Accepted by the Graduate Faculty, Indiana University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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May 21, 2020

For Tavis, Tess, Will, Norris, and Rage

Acknowledgements

Allan Wolf, teaching artist and founder of the Southern Fried Poetry Slam, said: "If you're not being fed—be the bread." Near the completion of this dissertation, I asked Allan to elaborate on his mantra. He told me, "In the first place it is a reminder that we all have the potential to become our own source of sustenance. In the second place it reminds us that if we include others in our banquet, we are rewarded by more than just a good meal. Abundance feeds off of itself."

There are many people in my life who live Allan's mantra, who have nurtured and sustained me in abundance. This dissertation is a trail of breadcrumbs—a testament to the teachers and artists who fed me and encouraged me to develop my own voice. But this dissertation is also about the power of naming. As such, there are some bakers in my life, who kneaded and pounded my voice, that I need to name.

Thank you to the pioneer architects like Allan. Thank you to the elders who laid a foundation for communal art and education. Thank you to the organizers and innovators who inspired me. Thank you to creators of the art, music, and literature who emboldened me.

While countless people educated me, there are three teachers who nourished me. I am eternally grateful for my elementary art teacher, Mrs. Hocker, and my high school English teachers, Mrs. Forester and Mrs. Hull. You are my models for being a giving educator.

Thank you to Brandon Cosby, Dan Durbin, Matt Gerbig, Jace Lux, Chris Grove, Bonny McDonald, Jenni White, and the other coaches who taught me to speak with conviction.

Thank you to Mary McGann, Gordon Mendenhall, Ray Smith, Jessica Lester, Lucinda Carspecken, Audrey Cunningham, and the other professors who taught me about the debt we

owe to students. Thank you to Cheryl Kirby Stokes, Donna Stephenson, Anthony Guest-Scott, and the other coordinators who taught me the value of building platforms for young people.

Thank you to Rebecca Painter, who invited me into her maximum security classroom. Thank you to Wendi Middleton, for encouraged me to make prison education my life's mission. To Lyndsey Lane, who taught me to weigh my battles when advocating for others. To Lizz Straight, who taught me the value of "ministry" in prison literacy.

Thank you to Saundra Faulkner, Monica Prendergast, John J. Guiney Yallop, and the other people who have mentored me in the poetic inquiry community.

Thank you to my friends at Indiana Humanities, and stakeholders of all the organizations who have supported my art and education initiatives.

An extra thank you to Jeni Kirby, Renee Lucas, Chanel Stickles, Margaret Beth Gore, Kay Moore, Trish Campbell, and the other office administrators who kept me in line and helped me when I needed it. You are the true architects of education.

Thank you to Taji Gibson, Brooke Harris Garad, Rose Jackson Buckley, Sandy Washburn, Mariella Arredondo, and my colleagues who uplifted me and pushed me to be the best version of myself. Thank you to Sandi Cole, for encouraging me to break down the barriers in education, especially the ones around me.

To my friends who have stuck with me since our formative years: thank you to Nick Romerhausen, who taught me kindness is a core component of communication. To Kate Hertweck, who challenged me to be a better man. Thank you to Chris Blackford, who taught me the language of loyalty. To Courtney Wright, my "duo patnah" for life. To Dave Nagel, who taught me that friendship takes deep dedication. To Crystal Roberson, who taught me to celebrate a snapshot of every day.

To my cohort: thank you to Mike Kersulov, because “Vroom, vroom, vroom.” To Alex Panos, who set the bar for being a passionate academic. To Joanne Yi, who taught me laughter and grace are essential to this work. To Alex Hollett, who taught me to honor other voices when I grace the stage. To Jill Scott, who taught me how to turn adversity into a smile and a story. To Casey and George Pennington, who taught me to find self-respect through resilience. To Summer Davis, for gifting me a blanket and asking about my day. To Mat Bumbalough, for being a good neighbor. To Evan Treece, who taught me to balance living and learning. To Jaclyn Dillman, who taught me rigor is no replacement for self-forgiveness.

Thank you to Stacy Bernaugh, who taught me to refine my hustle. Thank you to David Burns, who showed me the importance of growth and evolution. Thank you to James Hatchett, who taught me how to put my dreams on many plates and keep them spinning. To Kia Wells, who taught me to put the kids first. To Lauren Hall, who taught me the power of community. To Erin Livingston, who taught me to search for self-fulfillment. To Rebekah Jorjorian, for teaching me to believe in my own growth. To Marny Clark, who shaped up my soul and my beard too. For Chris Joslin, who taught me to celebrate the things I love. To Corey Ewing, who taught me to take service to others seriously. To Manny Casillas, for taking me to see a movie.

Thank you to the poets. To Cuban Hernandez, who taught me to “survive!” To Sierra DeMulder, for teaching me to believe I am worthy. To Jonathan Brown, for all the late night rock talks. To Sarita Goods, who taught me to take my business seriously. To Kirk Hardesty, who taught me to carry the spirit of legacy. To Ebony Payne, for teaching me to celebrate myself. To Shadow, for putting a chain around my neck in the streets of New Orleans. To Too Black, who taught me to elevate my critique. To Jasper Wirtshafter, who made me sprinkle my words with kindness. To Tony Brewer, for your letter and reminding me that poetry is a public service.

Thank you to Adrienne Nadeau, Robin Jackson, Thomas Budday, George Yamazawa, Asia Samson, Dorian Rogers, and Mike Bertram, for sending me messages that made me smile.

To Isis Pettway, Dara Mathis, Rick O'Neil, Jennifer and Robert Webb, Leah and Rick O'Neill, Mesh Kauser, Anara Whitebear, Steph Madison, Mikel Cole, Danielle Hernandez, Lorain Martin, Heather Reichert, and Buky-boo, for checking in on me. Thank you to Rebekah Sinders, for helping me get this dissertation APA ready.

Thank you to my partner, Siren Hand, for your trust and support, and for agreeing to quit this study. Thank you to my mother, Susan Henze, and my father, David Henze, and my family who have supported me. Thank you to my brother, Aaron Henze, always my biggest supporter.

Thank you to my students, who were my true teachers.

Finally, thank you to my friends in the poetry community who have passed away since I started my journey into graduate school in 2010. This dissertation is dedicated to you.

Adam D. Henze

MEANS OF CONVEYANCE: SPOKEN WORD PEDAGOGY, HIP HOP LITERACIES, AND THE CHALLENGES OF FOSTERING POETRY SPACES

This dissertation examined the relationships between teachers, students, and "teaching artists" (Graham, 2009) who use poetry as a vehicle for literacy learning. One popular practice is the use of "spoken word," (Somers-Willett, 2009) a fiery brand of performative poetry popularized by artists from the hip hop music scene (Hill, 2009) and the competitive poetry slam circuit (Woods, 2008). A wealth of qualitative studies extol the virtues of "spoken word pedagogy," (Kim, 2013; Low, 2011; Weinstein, 2010) noting its power when used as a vehicle for writers to construct literate identities (Fisher, 2007) and form critiques of socio-political issues (Jocson, 2008). To best understand how these dialogic communities operate in precarious times, this study explored the numerous, overlapping spaces where spoken word is used as a pedagogy for multiliteracies. This dissertation employed a practice that Prendergast (2009) called "poetic inquiry," a creative approach to qualitative inquiry where the researcher adopts the tools a poet uses to search for truth in the world. To explore critical issues in the global spoken word community, a new, hip-hop-infused version of poetic inquiry was created for this study, called "(re)mixed methods." The findings of this four year study reveal that collaborative teams of poets often face concrete challenges sustaining educational poetry programs, which threaten the relationships necessary to hearten such communities. Findings also highlight that many participants use poetry to name these barriers that repress them, authoring striking narratives about issues such as economic inequality, the need for school reform, structural racism, gender discrimination, the school-to-prison pipeline, and the unmet mental health needs of students. The implications of these findings challenge stakeholders to consider how spoken word pedagogy

serves as a conduit for intergenerational dialogue, and could be used to help collaborative learning communities envision a future beyond the challenges they face.

Keywords: poetry, spoken word pedagogy, hip hop literacies, poetic inquiry, youth culture

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Table of Contents

Prologue: Intake

In which the poet: introduces the poetry scene; defines concepts related to spoken word, hip hop, and literacy; explores the dynamic of teaching artists in a precarious educational landscape; and provides a rationale and guiding questions for his dissertation.

I remember we could see our own breaths out on the yard. The rec center was just visible ahead. After a deafening buzz and the shriek of steel slamming shut behind us, the only audible sound in the air was the soft crunch of frosted lawn beneath our shoes. I had never seen a prison so still. The way the sun seemed to rest on the fences in the distance reminded me of the beginning of an Andrea Gibson poem (2009): "It shouldn't be possible for a razorwire fence to look beautiful / but from the outside beneath the moonlit sky / in the falling snow it almost glows like tinsel" (p. 1).

If you teach creative writing, and are unafraid to "allow poetry to transport you" (Velazquez, 2018, p. 1), it's not entirely rare to be found mumbling words to yourself in some random prison yard. Poetry has taken me from classrooms to living rooms, from lecture halls to juvenile halls, and everywhere in between. Words usually play pinball in my brain before any writing workshop, but that morning I was just tagging along. For nearly a year a colleague and I had tried to start a creative writing program in the facility—a maximum security women's prison located in the Midwest —but no matter how many exclamation points we used in our emails, we weren't making traction with the right people in the administration. So instead of facilitating a writing circle or hosting an open mic that day, I was headed to the recreation center to emcee the prison's annual karaoke contest. Not my typical cross to bear.

In the auditorium, I taught women in gray jumpsuits how to adjust a microphone stand. I shared tips for overcoming stage fright and we practiced speaking from our diaphragms. I learned there hadn't been a creative writing instructor in the facility in several years, and that a number of women were hopeful that another poetry class would be offered one day. When I

finally got to shake hands with the education coordinator in the prison, I was hopeful our conversation would lead to a scenario where I could serve in the facility in ways that did not involve amateur renditions of "Summer Nights." The coordinator chuckled at me, like he was thinking of a joke in his head. "Well now," he simpered. "I heard you all brought a magician with you today."

A *magician*? I was offended on two levels. Selfishly, my years of experience as a practitioner and literacy advocate were likened to the skills of an entertainer at a five-year-old's birthday party. Becoming a master illusionist takes rigorous work, but magic tricks can't produce the educational outcomes that a poetry-related literacy program can. Less selfishly, it was clear to me that he undervalued the ubiquitous potential of poetry, and failed to see how my program would benefit incarcerated women any more than a man with a rabbit in a hat. I realized at that moment that this literal gatekeeper wasn't going to advocate for this work. In the restrictive world of prison education, where space, staff, and resources are scarce, I knew then and there that my poetry program wasn't about to happen here any time soon.

This anecdote personifies just one instance where I as a practitioner faced an enormous stopgap in my efforts to establish a literacy program; a gatekeeper in the facility had misunderstood my role and could not see the value I brought to the classroom, and as a result, incarcerated women would be denied an outlet for a form of powerful communication (Brooks & Johnson, 2010). Considering that spoken word pedagogy is a relatively new practice, a growing number of concerns have risen recently in the arts community concerning the ways spoken word artists have been misused, underutilized, and misrepresented in places of learning (Somers-Willett, 2009). A wealth of research has been written on hip hop and spoken word pedagogy (Dyson, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Stovall, 2005), but few academic articles have been written from the perspectives of practitioners who've lived the lifestyle of traversing fixed

spaces, crashing on a couch or changing a tire on the side of the road. As a result, few ethnographic accounts have been as revealing as two-time National Slam Champion Dr. Javon Johnson's 2017 book *Killing Poetry*, which highlights some vital issues for the community to consider regarding the fostering of safe spaces for women poets, the ways that artists often compete over resources and ideologies, and the way viral marketing has changed the ways consumers interact with poetry. In a political climate where literacy programs face continuous threats of fiscal neglect (Wilkinson, 2017) aimed specifically at freelance contractors (Mohammed, 2017), employees of nonprofit organizations (Fessler, 2017), and state-hired educators (Rothschild, 2017), the time to explore the emerging challenges that practitioning poets face has never been more urgent than now.

Focus of Study

The focus of this dissertation was to explore the relationships between teachers, students, and "teaching artists" (Graham, 2009) who use poetry as a vehicle for literacy learning. One popular practice is the use of "spoken word," (Somers-Willett, 2009) a fiery brand of performative poetry popularized by artists from the hip hop music scene (Hill, 2009) and the competitive poetry slam circuit (Woods, 2008). A wealth of qualitative studies have extolled the virtues of "spoken word pedagogy," (Kim, 2013; Low, 2011; Weinstein, 2010) noting its power when used as a vehicle for writers to construct literate identities (Fisher, 2007) and form critiques of socio-political issues (Jocson, 2008). Though there are competing interpretations of this term, in this study, I defined "spoken word pedagogy" as the theory and practice of using poetry that is meant to be spoken aloud as well as written on the page. I positioned my study within what Richardson (1999) called creative analytic practices (CAP), which entails creative, inventive approaches to qualitative inquiry. More specifically, I experimentally "played" with data by aligning the practices of this study with "poetic inquiry," which Prendergast (2009) described as

“a form of qualitative research in the social sciences that incorporates poetry in some way as a component of the investigation” (p. xxxv). In order to find commonalities between the language and practices of researchers and stakeholders from the spoken word community, I further bounded this work by drawing from concepts of hip hop culture. To do so, I generated and engaged with a new practice that I refer to as (re)mixed methods.

Using spoken word poetry as a narrative vehicle to explore the literacy practices of spoken word pedagogy allowed me as a researcher to contribute a fresh voice to a 20 year body of ethnographic work. A sizeable amount of the research on spoken word pedagogy essentially serves to cheerlead the positive aspects of the burgeoning practice: for example, a seminal publication by Bruce and Davis in 2000 advocates for the use of hip hop and spoken word poetry in secondary classrooms. The authors found that the expressive nature of poetry gives students a vehicle to resolve conflicts and explore critical issues (Bruce & Davis, 2000). Such pioneering articles are significant because they detail the benefits of using hip hop and spoken word poetry as canonical texts (McDaniel, 2000). It is also true that spoken word pedagogy has become a much more prevalent and commonly respected practice in educational institutions during the past twenty years (Sam-La Rose, 2013). In fact, a study funded by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) found that poetry readership among adults reached a 15-year high in 2018; the PBS NewsHour piece “How Young Writers are Leading a Poetry Comeback” gave partial credit to the increase in poetry-related youth programs that many readers now experience as teenagers (Hijazi, 2018).

Despite a few studies about the challenges of hosting poetry programming (Johnson, 2018; Weinstein & West, 2012), articles published by the research communities interested in spoken word mostly focus on the positive attributes of poetry programs. My anecdote from the prison is just one story that reminds me that research should also address the needs of

stakeholders who have decided to take up this work. Instead of adopting a binary view of spoken word pedagogy—focusing on the benefits and limitations—I have decided to dedicate my research to the ebbing and flowing relationships of stakeholders in the poetry community. By using what Richardson (1997) refers to as "poetic representation," I took an inventive approach to exploring the dynamics of fostering spoken word pedagogy in various learning contexts. My intention was to add to the existing field of literature to better understand spoken word pedagogy as a critical literacy practice (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2000), and investigate underexamined issues in this field of study.

Of interest to me is the way that spoken word is often used as an avenue for building intergenerational relationships in spaces of learning (Fields et al., 2014). I argue that the typical research focus on student/teacher relationships provides us with a limited understanding of standard practices in spoken word programming, because a third major stakeholder is often overlooked in this framing. The current literature largely consists of 1) peer-reviewed publications focused on student learning, and 2) practitioner-centered publications meant to help teachers implement spoken word into their traditional school curricula. This dissertation highlighted a third crucial actor who often serves a critical role in the building of spoken word programming in schools and literacy spaces: the teaching artist. Booth (2003) explained that scholars and practitioners have struggled to define this term for years, because no singular terminology or figure of authority exists in the overlapping arts and education fields. His ethnographic study of 19 colleagues from diverse fields such as theatre, music, and ceramics finds varying interpretations of what the role of teaching artist entails. After a thorough breakdown of similarities and differences in attitudes, Booth writes:

> I can propose this definition as a reduced core of agreement among our 19 colleagues: a Teaching Artist <emphasis his> is an artist, with the complementary skills and sensibilities of an educator, who engages people in learning experiences in, through, or about the arts. Perhaps it is too generic to be useful. Perhaps even this does not represent

full consensus. (p. 11)

To narrow the scope of this study, I solely focused on teaching artists who use poetry. But even in limiting my criteria, a mastery of poetry may refer to a multitude of processes and skills by practitioners in varying roles and disciplines. For example, my colleague Ashlee primarily tours the country performing his poetry at various colleges and universities, which is a different role than my friend Tim plays, who spends his summer traveling to different academies facilitating writing workshops for high school age poets. Like the participants of Booth's study, my participants used various terms to identify themselves and their roles as artists who teach. For the sake of inclusivity I use various terms (somewhat) interchangeably such as "poet educator," "visiting artist," and "traveling poet," which all fall under the purview of a "teaching artist" (Booth, 2003; Graham, 2009) who uses poetry in some way in a literacy space. I use "literacy space" here as an inclusive term, because spoken word pedagogy has increasingly become a common practice in secondary schools and higher education institutions, as well as alternative spaces of learning such as community centers, hospitals, detention facilities, and festival spaces.

I argue that spoken word pedagogy curricula and programming is most effective when there is a healthy relationship between students, teachers, and poets who work as teaching artists. However, in my twelve years of experience as a poet who teaches, I've seen that these relationships can be strained by various actors and institutions who operate outside this triforce (or truel relationship). As such, the primary aim of my dissertation was to explore the factors that shape the relationships between teaching artists, students, and "host teachers." The term host teacher refers to any teacher who collaborates and shares their classroom space with an educator or artist from outside their institution. Host teachers may invite an artist to visit their classroom for a variety of reasons: to perform their work, to lecture, host a workshop, foster a discussion, to participate in a panel, to model a skill, etc. While a large portion of my focus was on classroom

practices, I was also interested in including the perspectives of stakeholders who serve as hosts for institutions: organizers of poetry festivals; event planners on college campuses; paraeducators in elementary schools; and administrators, like my friend who brought me along for prison karaoke. I included these stakeholders under my umbrella term of "host teacher," because even if they do not hold a degree, they still serve in an educational capacity, as hosts of literacy spaces.

In this study, I explored the relationships necessary to create and sustain poetry-infused literacy spaces in three significant ways. First, I included the voices of teaching artists who have implemented spoken word programming in learning spaces. I invited these teaching artists to share success stories of working with student writers, and asked them about the challenges they have faced in sustaining spoken word programs. Second, I included the perspectives of teachers who play host to visiting artists. I encouraged host teachers to tell me why they invite teaching artists into their class, and asked about the difficulties they've experienced coordinating with artists from outside their literacy space. Most importantly, I wanted to know how poetry-infused relationships impact student writers. In this study I privileged the perspectives of "youth poets" who have engaged with spoken word pedagogy or have attempted to create their own spoken word programming at their school. Many youth poetry slam competitions, such as Brave New Voices, establish the age range of youth poet to be between thirteen and nineteen (Weiss & Herndon, 2001). I interviewed youth poets currently within this age range, as well as former students who are now in their twenties—many of whom now work as fledgling teaching artists themselves. Although I directed a spotlight toward youth poets, there are also adult learners included in the category of "student" in this study, such as festival attendees and participants in adult literacy programming. I included both youth and adult learners under the umbrella term of "student," since many poets in my life have adopted the writing processes they learned as students into life-long arts based inquiry practices.

By triangulating the voices of teaching artists, host teachers, and students, I highlighted the successes and struggles that poetry communities face in implementing spoken word pedagogy in literacy spaces. Richardson (1999) argues that numerous forms of creative expression, ranging from poetry to reader's theatre, can be systematically used by ethnographers through creative analytic practice. Notable classroom ethnography studies have used poetry as a data collection method (e.g., Bruce & Davis, 2000; Fisher, 2007). However, as someone who has learned to see poetry as a paradigm (Lorde, 1984), I never realized as a fledgling graduate student that I could use the form of inquiry I had already learned. I have spent years in juvenile detention centers, libraries, community centers, summer camps, and arts festivals, using my pen to gain a better understanding of the spaces I have occupied. Now, with a deeper understanding of the practices that encompass ethnography, I intend to use "experimental writing" (Richardson, 1997) to play with the conventions expected in a thoughtfully constructed dissertation.

Guiding Questions

The guiding questions for my dissertation were: *How do collaborative teams of youth poets, teachers, and teaching artists establish sustainable literacy communities?* Since I am interested in examining impacts and problem-solving to find potential solutions within the communities I serve, two critical sub-questions were, 1) *what kinds of gaps exist between students, teachers, and teaching artists*? And 2) *how do youth and adults navigate these gaps?* Merriam Webster's multiple definition of *gap* (2020) helped me conceptualize the metaphorical "chasms" that can be created between host teachers, teaching artists, and students (I have struck the definitions that are less open to interpretation):

> **1: a**~~: a break in a barrier (such as a wall, hedge, or line of military defense)~~
> **b**: an assailable position
> **2: a**~~: a mountain pass~~

b: ravine

3: ~~spark gap~~
4: a: a separation in space
b: an incomplete or deficient area * a *gap* in her knowledge
5: a break in continuity : hiatus
6: ~~a break in the vascular cylinder of a plant where a vascular trace departs from the central cylinder~~
7: lack of balance : disparity * the *gap* between imports and exports
8: a wide difference in character or attitude * the generation *gap*
9: a problem caused by some disparity * a communication *gap** credibility *gap*

Before reviewing key terms and definitions in detail, it is important to establish why a poet such as myself may feel reluctant about providing narrowly defined concepts related to poetry. While it is typically more common to decide upon a singular definition when defining terms in social science, Sullivan (2009) states that ambiguity is an important characteristic of poetry. For example, when settling on the title "Means of Conveyance" for this dissertation, I set an early precedent with my use of the word "conveyance," as there are multiple ways to infer meaning from the term. According to Merriam-Webster (2020), conveyance is a "means of transport." As such, themes of travel and transportation factored heavily into this dissertation. But convey also means "to impart or communicate by statement, suggestion, gesture, or appearance" (p. 2). Accordingly, a significant theme of this dissertation centered on the struggle to convey meaning about poetry to an academic audience used to writing that employs definitions with singular meanings. This tension between directness and ambiguity is as old as poetry itself. The haiku master Shinkei wrote in 1463:

> According to the old masters, double meaning is the lifeblood of poetry. It should by no means be shunned. Poem masterpieces that employ double meaning are innumerable, and it is an unskillful practitioner who cannot even compose a punning verse. On the other hand, there are those who, being too clever, produce only verses with double meaning on each and every occasion. To be so deeply engrossed in this matter that it becomes an obsession also makes for a kind of impediment (Ramirez-Christensen, 2008, p. 45).

With the convention of "double meaning" in mind, my aim was to ensure that terms with open-ended meanings convey revelatory deviations, and at the same time, I strived to not over-

rely on the convention to the level of impediment. Though I provided definitions for crucial concepts when warranted, I did not exhaustively tease out definitions for every term that creatively uses double-meaning, because the act of a reader juxtaposing interpretations on their own also leads to new meaning. As such, keeping the definition of *gap* open to interpretation allowed me to code the nuanced ways that *barriers* appear in relationships in the forms of *disparity, difference in attitude, break or separation,* and perhaps even *assailability*. In lieu of analyzing my data with a narrowed, simplified codification paradigm, poetic methods provided me a vehicle to explore the complex, murky ways that the relationships between stakeholders wax and wane.

Defining Terms (or Situating Slam, Hip Hop, the Academy, and Myself)

"Poetry slam" is a term that was coined by poet and construction worker Marc Smith (Somers-Willett, 2009), and refers to competitions where poets perform their own original poetry in front of an interactive audience, some of whom have been selected to act as judges (Woods, 2008). "They're like rap battles, but a little nerdier," I usually say when people look at me funny upon hearing the term. Though Smith is credited with creating the terminology and format of poetry slam in 1986, it is important to know that competitive poetry formats have existed across diverse cultures throughout history. One notable example is Matsuo Bashō's "Seashell Game," which dates back to 1672 in Edo era Japan (Hamill, 2004). Bashō's students competed in an early version of a head-to-head "battle" (Alim, 2011): each poet would write a haiku and anonymously place it under a seashell, and Bashō would read each one to determine a winner. In contemporary times, the practice of slam has became an increasingly popular "sport" (Devlin, 1998) to play in bars and coffee shops in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and many poets from the scene (or "slammers") exploded into mainstream popularity in the late 1990s and early 2000s, appearing on MTV, HBO, PBS, and other global media platforms (Aptowicz, 2008).

Somers-Willett (2009) claims that many patrons saw the works of slammers as an alternative to the growing genre of gangsta rap, and therefore their brand of performative poetry was increasingly marketed with the label "spoken word." By 2000, an increasing number of educators had made the vow to adopt more youth culture into their education curricula (Bennett, 2000), and some pioneering teachers began using spoken word and hip hop as a pedagogy (Bruce & Davis, 2000).

There are now thousands of schools around the world that provide access to youth poetry slam competitions (Woods, 2008). As a result, many educators mistakenly refer to "slam" as a genre or style of poetry—not as a mechanic for competition. When a school invites me for a lecture or a workshop, often they will advertise me as a "slam poet," even though they know of me acontextually from the competitions I've hosted or participated in. They may use the word "slam" to describe a type of poetry that is theatrical, or uses writing conventions found in hip hop, or even because the poetry itself contains critical themes about society and identity. Regardless of the argument that there is no such genre referred to as slam (Gilpin, 2016), I believe it is beneficial to consider what the qualities of a perceived "slam poet" are that set them apart from authors traditionally found in the English canon. Identifying the unique qualities of a "slam poet" may then provide us some context for considering what unique challenges they face, and what challenges they may themselves bring with them into educational spaces. From my experience, the moniker of slam poet commonly refers to a practitioner with stake in poetry communities such as slam, and it is often assumed that someone deemed a slam poet will showcase work that is more engaging, authentic, or even provocative.

While spoken word pedagogy shares numerous conventions with poetry slam competitions, other interrelated concepts are derived from hip hop culture (Low, 2011). Richardson (2006) provides literacy and language researchers with the term "hip hop literacies,"

which is the exploration of literacy practices such as reading rap lyrics, listening to performed poems, writing verses, and reciting spoken word with peers in a process called "cyphering" (Williams, 2009). According to Williams, "historically the cypher was the place within Hip Hop culture <emphasis his> where emcees would get together in a circle and initiate a 'freestyle' construction of rhymes" (pg. 2). Williams further conceptualizes the cypher through a Freirean lens, claiming that the critical process of the circle serves as "a freestyle construction of knowledge about the culture that is lived and loved" (pg. 2). On the surface, the cypher in hip hop culture is a way to pass rhymes around a circled group, but on a deeper level the cypher represents the sharing of truths in a democratic way. This is a long-honored tradition in many societies, and McCold (2001) reminds us, "the circle is central to traditional aboriginal cultures and social processes" (p. 48). The metaphor of the cypher is a reminder that there have been many diverse voices that have come before me in this work, and I am just one of many voices in a handful of the countless circles that makeup the global spoken word community. The cypher metaphor also reminds me when I get my turn on the mic, I better be both authentic and unique. I better "go in," or "bring it," as someone might shout from the audience of a poetry slam. Using poetry as a method for both praxis and inquiry, a journey I must make in this dissertation is the contending of where my place is within the cypher. I believe the questions raised by poets in the global community will help me discover where I am. Where does one go when one "goes in?" (Brown, 2013). What is the nature of "it" that I am supposed to bring (Baca, 1990)?

Another concept in this dissertation relevant to my identity as a poetic ethnographer is the notion of "remix literacies" (Gainer & Lapp, 2010). Borrowing the notion of remixing from hip hop culture, which refers to the way sound engineers remix samples of sounds to create new musical compositions (Miller, 2004), a "literacy remix" education curricula focuses on "the intertextual connections" in hip hop media so students can "build their understandings of

literature situated in particular social, cultural, and historical contexts (Gainer & Lapp, 2010, p. 45). The concept of the remix correlates to the concept of "multiliteracies," (Cazden et al, 1996), which treats things like songs, films, photos, comics, podcasts, and other forms of popular media as "texts." The adoption of hip hop literacies in classroom curricula has resulted in an increased need for educators who may not have taken the path of being a licensed teacher: a school may reach out to a silk screen printer to complement an arts curricula, for example, or collaborate with a music technician in lieu of an orchestral musician. Though the findings of my dissertation are relevant to teaching artists of varying disciplines, my attention was specifically focused on teaching artists who might refer to themselves as "poets," "slammers," "rappers," "emcees," "performance artists," "griots," "spoken word artists," or "doers of poetry."

One reason I used differentiated terms for concepts and monikers is because each term may carry a different meaning to each person. For example, a participant may identify as a "spoken word artist" because they want to showcase the performativity of their work, or they want to highlight their reverence for oral storytelling, or simply, they may believe the label makes them more marketable to those who book talent. Some of the terms may carry specific connotations: for example, the label rapper is likely to be adopted by someone whose lyricism exists primarily within the hip hop community, while the label of griot carries connotations related to the storytelling traditions of West African culture (Tang, 2005). Many of the stakeholders involved in the studies cited in my literature review unpack these labels ascribed to their identities in nuanced ways I cannot accurately paraphrase. At the same time, participants in my study might identify with the same labels as stakeholders in the literature review, but for different reasons. It was not a primary focus for me to tease out (or police) the labels used by participants in my study; instead, my aim was to examine whether my participants are supported and treated with dignity in their work relationships, regardless of what terms they prefer.

At the same time, I also had to contend with which label to adopt that best represents me as a storyteller. Over the course of my time as a graduate student, I have been relied upon as a poet; a teacher; a researcher; a performer; an organizer; a historian; and more. My shifting identities were an evolving topic throughout this dissertation, and throughout, I have considered how these varying identities affected the voice in my writing. In October of 2019 I attended a hip hop concert in Indianapolis, and one of the openers for headliners Rapsody and Big K.R.I.T. asked the audience, "We get any rappers in the building?" One voice shouted defiantly from the audience, "I'm an EMCEE!" Hip hop artists ranging from Rakim Allah (2015) to Raekwon the Chef (2015) have debated the differences between being a rapper and emcee (or "master of ceremonies"), but in my perspective, the label of emcee has often been adopted as a defiant moniker by those who feel their worldview transcends what society expects of "rappers" or "hip hop artists." Standing with my arms folded in the audience, I related to this reframing. I am a poet, but I am more. I am a researcher, but I am more. Forever on, and within this dissertation, I am all encompassingly: an emcee.

Reentry

In the course of writing this dissertation, I delved into some of the challenges that practitioners of spoken word pedagogy face, and explored some "new" methods for delving into ways to understand and solve such problems. Ultimately, telling stories about lived experience can become "a tool for self-understanding" (Desai, 2016, p. 801), and the spaces of these stories "focus on collective learning and foster a culture of listening and expression" (p. 813). My aim was to create something with multiple scopes: a work that is both close and intimate and extends far to see the vast reach that spoken word has as a global movement.

Poetry can be used as a tool to repair rips in our society. When I don't know what to do, sometimes I turn to poetry. Hip hop and spoken word can be used as a powerful vehicle to

mobilize groups of people to make change (Clay, 2006), which is why my mind has been fixated on a story about prison karaoke. In my dissertation I delved into dozens of other stories like this, and I invited stakeholders in the community to share their experiences visiting universities, hospitals, bars, coffee shops, secondary schools, television stations, and recording studios. For now, I am ending this chapter with a personal narrative of defeat. The chuckling education coordinator would eventually leave the facility a year or two later, and I would finally be invited by another administrator to pilot a short poetry writing series in the prison. Over the next eight years, that tiny spark of opportunity would turn into a sustainable program that has served hundreds of incarcerated learners. But I didn't know this on that windy day. All I knew that day: there would be no sanctioned space for poetry here.

As I exited the rec center of the women's prison, frustrated, walking fast and bellowing frigid wind into my chest, Andrea Gibson's poem was still beating at my brain like a punching bag. The poem gives an ethnographic account of a poetry reading in the auditorium of a maximum security prison. "There is a microphone standing like hope" (Gibson, 2009, p. 1). That day, as I passed the chapel on my way to the front gate, I didn't have hope enough to pray that this institution would ever have its own literacy program. Spending time with the women in the facility felt rewarding in the same way that a communion wafer is rewarding: the work is dry, almost tasteless when you bite in, but somehow your chest is less heavy in the end. And while their laughter during their epically raucous performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* was as sweet as sacramental wine, I realized I would not be properly utilized in that administration's classroom. I knew I had to dedicate the limited time I have to a learning environment where I can be an effective educator, and when I said goodbye to the women that day I didn't have the heart to tell them I wouldn't be back anytime soon.

Now more than ever, it is imperative that learners of all ages have the ability to tell their own story. As the shrinking budgets of educational institutions continue to threaten the quality of liberal arts instruction in our schools, it is likely that educators will continue to turn to teaching artists from the slam community to serve as guest instructors. As I exited the prison and walked towards my car, I wondered about what stories should be told about this floundered meeting. Curious about where my next literacy adventure would be—a prep school or another prison perhaps—I thought of Andrea Gibson's (2009) jailhouse open mic as I revved the gas and watched the fences disappear in my rearview mirror. Like Gibson, I want to help fledgling poets tell a story as nuanced as their lives:

> Is razorwire on Christmas morning the anthem / you want to sing to your future? / Of the 98 men in this room / there isn't one that is claiming to be an angel / But we all have shoulder blades that would sharpen like switchblades / if our wings were being ripped off / if our lives were being ripped off / The sky knows justice and genocide are not words you can use in the same sentence / Children are born with their chests full of birds (p. 1).

Part I: The Open Mic

If a performer attempts to preface their poem at the historic Nuyorican Poet's Cafe, it is tradition for the crowd to yell at the stage, "Read your fucking poem!" O'Conner (1997) addresses this anti-explanatory convention of poetry, arguing that authors should minimize the commentary about their own poem. After all, if a poem needs explanation and the language is not communicative on its own, then the poem may not be successful (or at least worth reading). This conflicts with a common convention of qualitative inquiry, where researchers are expected to explicitly explain their claims to a point of saturation. In this dissertation, you will see me wrestle with these conflicting conventions. On the one hand, I feel resistant to overexplain the poems of participants, because that would compromise their openness to interpretation, and I don't want to "academize" language that is best expressed through poetry. On the other hand, I recognize that readers may need guidance reading an unconventional dissertation, and as such, I have decided to include a short preface and roadmap to each of the three parts of this study.

Like a poetry slam, this dissertation is a performative body of work made up of several, smaller amalgamated parts. Like the chapters of this dissertation, the poems of a slam stand on their own, but also build upon and inform our understandings of other "pieces" in the bout. Given their similarities, I decided to structure the parts of this dissertation like a poetry slam, which is often divided into 1) an open mic, 2) a feature, and 3) a slam. The beginning of each part will include an explanation of what the related concept means, followed by descriptive summaries for each chapter within.

An open mic is a dedicated space that is "open" to members of the public who would like to perform on the "mic" (Fisher, 2003). Many organizers include open mics at the beginning of their shows, as a way to invite writers and thinkers of all experience into the conversation. Like a poetry event, the chapters of the "open mic" section "set the stage" for what is to come. This is the formative portion of my dissertation, which lays the foundation of what the audience should expect. On the night of the slam, the open mic is the part that warms up the crowd.

Part I of this dissertation consists of four chapters. In "The Ninth," I discuss the paradigmatic lenses I share as a poet and researcher, and introduce the spaces of interest that served as the field sites for this dissertation. I also take the reader on a trip to New Orleans in "The Ninth," and introduce readers to a site called the "Southern Fried Poetry Slam." In "Poetry On Demand," I examine how poetry can be used as a vehicle to observe the world and converse with the people in it. In the chapter I explore the practice of "Poetry On Demand," and discuss how poetry can be used as vehicle for conducting interviews. In "Remixing Frankenstein," I introduce a hip-hop infused form of poetic inquiry that I call "(re)mixed methods." This chapter includes the methodology of this dissertation, and I use a humanities program called "FrankenSlam" to show how I collected and analyzed data for this study. Finally, "A Poem's Worth" positions educational poetry programming as a critical pedagogy of multiliteracies. I defend the practice of using poetry in classroom spaces by returning to the prison seen in the Prologue, to help the reader imagine the possibilities of using spoken word pedagogy as a vehicle for literacy learning. After the introductory open mic portion of this dissertation, the reader should be prepared to delve into all the aspects of this multi-year study.

The Ninth

In which the poet: defends the use of the "autoethnographic I"; explores poetry as a form of "embodiment" and "kritik": conceptualizes poetry literacy spaces as "third places" and "third spaces"; and provides a survey of places and participants of this dissertation.

Four years after Hurricane Katrina, a poet friend took me to visit the abandoned Ninth Ward neighborhood in New Orleans to show me the damage that remained. I was on tour in the city, visiting several schools during the day and spoken word venues at night. I had spent time with enlightening teenage and adult writers that week, and as we pulled up to the row of homes, I thought of all the Louisiana artists I knew who were displaced by the storm. The sun's red edge kissed the water's surface as we walked alongside the levee, and I asked my friend what the spray-painted markings on the boarded up buildings meant. He explained they were a communication system used by the Urban Search and Rescue Task Force called "X-Codes" (Moye, 2009): one quadrant of the cross detailed the date and time of the search, another counted the number of people found, alive or deceased.

As I scanned the X-Codes on the rows upon rows of houses, I became very aware of my positionality within this space and how my reading of the codes must be informed by the identities that I carry with me. I read the codes as a teacher. I read the codes as a tourist. I read the codes as an American. I read the codes as a white male. I read the codes as a poet.

I wanted to say something about the moment, something both temperamental and tender. I decided to write a haibun, a Japanese hybrid form that mixes travel monologue and haiku.

> September 15, 2009. The Ninth Ward. Plyboard and pried nails. Toxic soil. Dead count scrawled in chalk. White X's. Twisted steel and crumbled concrete. Local poets say the smell tells us bodies are still in them houses. The levees just the size of a suggestion. Waves break against the space where sandbags might be placed.
>
> second line trombones
> swinging sound and blown tongue brass
> still walk the wet streets

I chose haibun because the gravity of the scene urged me to use a form where I can remove myself from the poem and focus on the thick description of the landscape (Hirsch, 2014). Though I removed the first person "I," I can see reflecting on it a decade later that my identities are still imprinted on poem: the etic (or outsider) perspective of the haibun conveys that I am a tourist; the descriptions of the markings on the houses are a metaphorical indictment of whiteness; the poem is American because it is more violent than I initially remembered it being. The teacher in me attached the haiku at the end because I wanted to counterbalance the scene with a lively description of the community that had welcomed me that week.

While writing this dissertation, I returned to memories like these often, to consider how my journeys as a poet have impacted my paradigms as a researcher. My experiences in New Orleans informed my decision to adopt the stance of an "agent-of-change" (Fielding, 2001). When conducting ethnographic research in communities who've faced distress, the one question I have never been able to answer is *how does one remain objective in the middle of a hurricane?* When the wind is howling and the levies have been breached, how are we supposed to maintain a sense of "disinterestedness" (Merton, 1973)? Isn't that like an Airforce One flyover of a submerged Ninth Ward? Sometimes when I look in a student's eyes and see a hand waving on a rooftop I wonder if maybe I am just supposed to write a poem instead.

When I wrote the poem I didn't yet have the identity of qualitative researcher. Experiences like these influenced my ethical paradigms and lenses for viewing the world. As a qualitative researcher who moonlights as a spoken word artist, I often reflect on poems of my experiences to see what lessons I have learned about inquiry. When I take time to study my poems and reflect on these memories, I am often reminded of all the ways poetry has evolved the way I approach public spaces and talk to the people in them. This is why I revisit the lessons I've learned as a performing artist to examine how they have informed my critical paradigms and

reflexive lenses as a researcher. By understanding what is observable and discussable to my poet self, I believe that readers will gain a better understanding of the foundation of this study.

The lesson I learned reflecting on my poem is that I cannot cast away my identities in my writing, even if I try. This is true of my poetry, as well as the other disciplines that helped me form my voice. I can think of three specific performative periods of my life that affected my approach to finding truth: 1) in competitive forensics (or speech and debate); 2) in poetry; and 3) as a critical qualitative researcher. In this chapter, I explore how these communication-based disciplines influenced the paradigms in which I search for truth in the world. I argue that it is important for researchers in the field of qualitative inquiry to take such audits of their stance, because a writer's positionality affects how they write about the spaces they visit and people they speak with. My aim in writing this chapter was to take an audit of my paradigms to give readers of this dissertation a better understanding of my relationships to places and people in the field. Perhaps poets have some perspectives on observation and discourse that the greater research community could learn from. The first section explores how the voices of this dissertation were guided by two aspects of speech and debate: "kritik" and "embodiment." I then discuss how these two concepts encouraged me to embrace the autoethnographic "I," as both a qualitative researcher and poet. In the second section, I extend the analysis of my writer identity to consider how it has affected the ways I write about the spaces I traverse. I explore Oldenburg's (1989) notion of the third place and Gutiérrez's (2008) notion of third space to reveal many unique qualities of poetry-related literacy spaces. In the third section of this chapter, I consider how my stance affects the narratives I tell about the people I meet in these poetry spaces. More specifically, this section introduces the participants of this dissertation and provides background information about their poetry-related literacy space is of interest to me as a researcher.

Embodiment and Kritik as Embrace of Self

I stood on that New Orleans levee, scanning the breaks of the tide like lines of poetry. The spoken word has taught me ways of reading the world. The moment helped to solidify a commitment I've made to myself as a writer: if I am going to lend my body and voice to a stage, then I can never be neutral. This is why I became drawn to the action-oriented practice of critical qualitative inquiry (Denzin, 2016). Using poetry as a vehicle for creative qualitative inquiry has helped drive my focus as a researcher toward uncovering critical issues within communities. Poetry helps people name things that often go unsaid (Tannenbaum, 2000), so for this dissertation, I decided to use poetry as a vehicle to identify and solve critical issues in the communities where I find myself. I contend that the greater qualitative research community has a lot to learn from the collaborative discourses of poets: while the inquiry processes of artist networks may be structured differently than qualitative research teams, a significant amount of our dialogue as writers revolves around critical issues in the poetry community. The discourses of our community have been informed by critically conscious poets like Audre Lorde, bell hooks, June Jordan, Marti Evans, and Gloria Anzuldua, who have also arguably shifted the paradigms of educators and researchers outside the poetry community.

The first time I ever travelled to a strange city with a list of poems to read, I was a fifteen-year old competitor on a yellow school bus headed to a regional speech and debate tournament. Though I may have incubated my language of critique in graduate school and the slam community, I originally learned the language of "kritik" (Bennett, 1996) from these high school forensics competitions. While "critique with a k" originated in the field of philosophy, Bennett explains that kritik was "introduced to policy debate as a form of attack that attempts to redirect the focus of debate to whether or not to reject ideas which support or uphold undesirable ideology, language, or world views" ("An introduction to the kritik," p. 1). For example, a

debater may run kritik against an opponent who uses deficit language to talk about young school children. The argument attacks the overarching paradigms and rhetorical structures of the speaker rather than the feasibility of the argument. The notion of kritik was vital to the development of my voice as a poet and researcher, because it taught me the value of choosing precise words to align an argument to my ethical paradigm.

Another important lesson I learned from the speech and debate community is that this notion of kritik is often inseparable from the bodies and identities of the speakers in the round. For example, a feminist kritik may be proffered by a speaker who identifies as a woman to counterattack against sexist or misogynistic rhetoric. Since the speaker's body is present during the argument, the body and its identities inherently become an unspoken part of the argument. Perry and Medina (2011) describe embodiment as "teaching and learning in acknowledgement of our bodies as whole experiential beings in motion, both inscribed and inscribing subjectivities" (p. 63). Our bodies are essential in our representation of truth and therefore, it is important that we as storytellers become attuned to the discourses inherent in them. These lessons of embodiment and kritik are important to consider for this study, since slam competitions consist of competitors staging an argument using their bodies and voices.

I initially saw the interconnectivity between embodiment and kritik when I was a competitor in speech and debate, but the links became even more crystalized when I began embracing spoken word as a primary mode for performative expression. Somers-Willett (2009) says the following about poets from the slam community: "Inhabiting the space where the 'I' of the page translates quite seamlessly to the 'I' of the stage, the author comes to embody declarations about personal experience in performance" (p. 69). This is not only true of "visible markers" such as gesture and physicality; aspects of identity such as race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, age, and disability become markers that "provide lenses through which an audience

receives a poem" (Somers-Willett, 2009, p. 70). The body inscribes subjectivities (Perry & Medina, 2011) which affects the relevancy and trust between a speaker and listener, which is why in my time as a researcher I have increasingly embraced a poetic "I" in the narratives I share in academic circles.

The paradigms of embodiment and kritik compel me as a researcher to embrace subjectivity as a preferred standpoint, which can be dissonant to researchers who believe a disinterested approach equates to greater objectivity. I argue that embracing a subjective voice is the way I need to represent my interpretation of the truth. According to Paolo Freire (1970):

> To deny the importance of subjectivity in the process of transforming the world and history is naïve and simplistic. It is to admit the impossible: a world without people. This objectivistic position is as ingenious as that of subjectivism, which postulates people without a world. (p. 50)

By denying the existence of ourselves in our stories, we are also essentially negating the existence of others. Activist and scholar Angela Davis (2016) claimed that the inclusion and interconnectivity of the many identities of the body politic are vital to achieving a just society. She writes "that we cannot assume that it is possible to be victorious in any antiracist movement as long as we don't consider how gender figures in, how gender and sexuality and class and nationality figure into those struggles" (p. 31). At the same time, Davis claimed it is important to address how monikers such as race and gender relate to power, because a patriarchal society or white supremacist society embolden maleness or whiteness respectively. As a white male American, it is important that I attend to my identity in a critical way, because only then I can understand how the relation of my body to power can affect my telling of a story.

Ultimately, the concepts of embodiment and kritik have given me avenues as a researcher to think critically about my own research processes. Peshkin (1988) argued that researchers "should systematically identify their subjectivity throughout the course of their research" (p. 17). He refers to this process as a "subjectivity audit," and I contend that the composition of poetry

provides opportunities to name and kritik of subjectivities inscribed upon this body of work. The aims of Peshkin's subjectivity audit closely resemble Freire's (1970) notion of critical praxis, meaning an imbedded goal of speaking critically about the self also means speaking critically about the world in which the self resides. Though forms of kritik differ in policy debate, a basic premise is that solvency cannot be achieved if a plan relies on a toxic foundation of policy and discourse. As such, poets can use the language of kritik to conceptualize how critical issues can be solved. To achieve solvency in critical discourse communities, members must overcome inherent barriers in order to address prevalent harms. A "harm" refers to any problem in the status quo that is deemed hurtful or harmful, either physically, mentally, culturally, or socioeconomically. Inherency refers to any barrier standing in the way of achieving solvency. Inherency is seen most commonly as a structural barrier (related to law or policy, for example) or an attitudinal barrier (related to a bias or prejudice, for example). Ergo, the language of kritik can help discourse communities name the barriers to remove in order to solve harms. This a major aim of mine, as both a poet and qualitative researcher. Many participants of this dissertation took the opportunity to name issues they face in their communities, and poetry provided us a common critical language to envision an ideal world free of harms and barriers.

Third Place and Third Space

The first time I visited New Orleans was 2008, just a year before my expedition to the ninth ward. I was a recent college graduate and fledgling spoken word artist, co-presenting at one of my first educational conferences, alongside my former forensics coach from high school. Like the veteran academics attending the conference, my experience of New Orleans was limited to the convention center and tourist areas of Bourbon and Canal Street. Like poems, cities seem richer with depth the more we revisit them. Though I can't remember a single moment from the educational conference, my memory is imprinted with images of walking the cobblestone streets

and sticking our heads into old jazz clubs, speakeasies, and strip clubs. The conference was an opportunity for my varying identities to converge in one space, and my initial experiences of New Orleans urged me to think of the lessons I have learned while traveling from place to place.

Competitive forensics and poetry slam were both significant to my formal education, because they both served as examples of pedagogies where most of the learning takes place somewhere between in-and-out of school spaces. For example, most of my learning experiences in speech and debate happened in spaces that weren't quite school: like, in the speech office, which was in my school, but was also a place where I could eat snacks and cuss and hang out with friends after classes. Or at speech meets, which were often in classrooms, but typically on weekends at whichever school was hosting for that tournament. A lot of regimented learning in speech takes place in a classroom setting, yes, but learning also took place at the restaurant after the meet, and the hotel, and in the 15-passenger van on the way home from a regional tournament.

The knowledge and cultural production of spoken word pedagogy also takes place somewhere between school and an area that Gutiérrez (2008) calls the third space. The third space is a conceptual space that occurs somewhere between the places of learning and the places of living. In his book *The Great Good Place*, sociologist Ray Oldenburg (1989) conceptualizes the settings for social interaction into three distinct places: the first place is the home; the second place is the workplace (or school, for students); the third place is all the other venues where community building takes place, such as "cafés, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, hair salons, and other hangouts" (Oldenburg, 1989). Gutiérrez (2008) is critical of best practices in schools, arguing that many such learning styles stand in contrast to the authentic learning that exists in collaborative communities outside of school. She conceptualizes this out-of-school learning as a notional third space. Spoken word and hip hop was birthed on stoops and street corners, and

evolved for decades in basement DIY shows and hole-in-the-wall pubs. In the past 20 years, scores of educators have recognized the importance of including student culture in their classroom curricula (Moll et al., 1992), and as a result, the lines between the second and third place have become blurred for stakeholders in the global spoken word revolution.

Considering how poetry operates in the transference between spaces is important here, because this murkiness complicates the way I speak about my participants and settings in two different ways. First, I feel compelled to study spoken word pedagogy as a classroom practice, even in situations where the site contains no actual classrooms. Some of the settings of this dissertation took place in spaces that are adjacent to the second place: the gymnasium of a school, a summer academy at a university, and a street fair in the middle of a college town. Second, I feel compelled to study spoken word as an example of "youth culture" (Morell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002), even in situations where everyone at the site is an adult. Though I frame spoken word pedagogy as a classroom practice, not all of my participants were students in the traditional sense. Some participants were adult students, for example, or patrons of an arts festival, yet all of them participated in a literacy practice that has been conceptualized by researchers as "youth culture" (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002).

Participants and Settings

My third visit to New Orleans was a much bigger journey in scope: I was serving as the volunteer coordinator of the 2013 Southern Fried Poetry Slam, the largest regional poetry slam tournament in the United States. Founded in 1992, the festival is the longest-running open poetry slam in the world, and convenes every year at a predetermined city in the Southeast United States. I first attended the festival in Birmingham as a competitor in 2006, and over the next seven years, my role would shift from participating artist to a member of the organizing body. I had the tourist experience my first time, the townie experience my second time, and for my third

visit to New Orleans I felt energized at the idea of giving something back to a community with such a rich history and connection to poetry and hip hop.

In my tenure as an organizer, the Southern Fried Poetry Slam has been held in Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Texas. Over the past decade, organizers have turned this loosely-structured festival into a sustainable nonprofit organization called Southern Fried Poetry, Inc. Southern Fried was one of the primary sites of investigation for this dissertation. How could I introduce this site without first sharing my lessons from New Orleans? How could I describe the hundreds of poets from around the country who descended to the Crescent City that week without painting a picture of the streets we walked on? In this dissertation, I decided the best way to set the stage for my settings and participants was to tell stories. The rotating Southern Fried "site" is just one of many places of interest in this dissertation, which includes sites hosting varied literacy programming for kids, teens, and adults.

Poetry has taken me to a number of different places as an artist and educator: elementary schools, universities, art festivals, crowded street corners. A significant amount of published research on spoken word units in English classrooms are single-site ethnographic studies (Alexander-Smith, A.C., 2004; Bruce & Davis, 2000; Desai, 2016; Dyson, 2005; Fisher, 2007; Hill, 2008; Low, 2011; Machado et al., 2017; Rudd, 2012), which may or may not dedicate a little space to observations of poetry at performances outside the classroom. However, this is not always what the field looks like for professional performance poets and teaching artists, who travel internationally to multiple sites on both short-term and long-term bases. I have fostered many semester-length creative writing courses with familiar participants, but many of my experiences as a teaching artist have been visiting new spaces and meeting new people. These limited series or "one-off" events typically come in two forms: 1) as "performances," which include lecturing, reading my poetry to the audience, and facilitating "Q & A"-style discussions,

and 2) as "workshops," which include group reading, writing, and recitation activities. Often schools and community hire me for these types of events to encourage participants to start conversations with each other. My role as poetry liaison brings me to both familiar and unfamiliar places, so it was impossible to isolate my work as a poet to just one site for this dissertation. I decided to examine the multiple spaces where poetry has led me.

Since most of my lived experiences as a poet have occurred between spaces, I struggled to isolate the settings of this study into singular sites. For example, I followed Southern Fried to several different cities during my three-year study, and my visits also included road trips through unfamiliar territory and conversations across digital spaces. It was also difficult to pin down the roles my participants played in each space. My student in one place may be a colleague in another place. I co-taught with participants in one setting, and then competed against them in a poetry slam in another setting. Instead of describing my field as a specific place or specific set of participants, I decided to conceptualize the field of this dissertation as a set of overlapping narrative "threads." For example, it was hard to explore Southern Fried as a space, since it moves from city to city every year. It was also hard to describe Southern Fried as a specific set of participants, since the attendees change every event. So instead, I conceptualized Southern Fried as a narrative thread, and introduced it as a story. Southern Fried is just one of seven narrative threads in this dissertation. The remainder of this section serves as an overview of each thread in this dissertation. I have provided a table that 1) summarizes each narrative thread, 2) introduces the settings associated with each thread, and 2) and describes the participants of each thread (see Appendix A).

Poetry and the Transformation of Space

A major benefit of framing my poetic journey as a conveyance between spaces is that it gives me a chance to highlight spoken word as a form of "transformative learning" (Wright et al.,

2010). In this dissertation you will see many ways that poetry can transform spaces, but you will also see the ways poetry has transformed me as well. One of the tasks for the organizers of the Southern Fried Poetry Slam in New Orleans was to help fix up a venue called Sweet Lorraine's Jazz Club. A mainstay in the French Quarter for over 30 years, the historic club was forced to close in 2012 after the roof and walls sustained heavy water damage from Hurricane Isaac. The building had been without power for a while now, and apparently the air conditioning hadn't worked in over a year. Days before the festival, I worried whether the venue would be ready to be used in competition. We installed industrial sized fans in the back of the club, and solved the wiring issue by placing candles on every table. When I walked into the club the first day of the festival, I could only describe the vibe in the air as something magical. For the first time in years, poetry was spoken on the stage of Sweet Lorraine's. For a short moment I sat in the back and watched words dance across the stage like a swaying jazz band. Then I headed out the door, to tackle the next problem ahead.

Poetry On Demand

In which the poet: explores poetry as a discursive practice; introduces the concept of a poet's "shtick"; discusses what is observable about the poetry "process," "product," and "practice"; observes what is discussable about poetry-related "literacy events"; and describes interview protocols for this dissertation.

"You can't order a poem like you order a taco."
- Naomi Shihab Nye (1994)

Imagine this: it is a sunny day in September and you are strolling along the street in a Midwest college town. Each side of the street is lined with kiosks of vendors selling paintings, ceramic bowls, figures made of rusted metal, and sparkly trinkets forged from hand blown glass. Among the sounds of shuffling feet and families laughing you hear sounds in the distance you haven't heard in years: the frenetic slap of metal plates against platen, the unmistakable *ping* of a carriage return lever yearning for a shove. You follow the sound until you behold a cluster of tables underneath a tent. Seated behind the tables are four poets typing at typewriters. You mosey your way toward the table as if your ear is leading you and muster the courage to ask the stranger why they're typing on a typewriter in the middle of an outdoor art festival.

"This is *Poetry on Demand*," a woman says while placing card stock into the paper table and turning the platen knob. She points to a jar of money on the table: "We're asking for five-dollar donations today. Basically, you get to demand a poem. You pick the theme or topic for me to write about: I'll spend a couple minutes interviewing you, asking you questions and getting some specific details. Then take 15 or 20 minutes to peruse around the festival, and when you come back I will have a tailor-made poem typed up just for you!"

"A poem about whatever I want?" you ask skeptically.

"Whatever you want," she says, shuffling through scribbled notes in her journal. "I wrote this for a woman who wanted a poem about her mother who passed. And this one: a group of teenage girls wanted a poem about 'spaghetti' and told me to make up the rest."

At hearing this information, your mind may drift backward toward the events that have shaken you or molded you. You may decide you want to hear a poem about the beagle you adopted from the pound, or the time you went mountain climbing and saw the northern lights. This is *Poetry on Demand*, and if nothing else, it proves Naomi Shihab Nye's famous adage to be incorrect: you can indeed order a poem like you order a taco.

When people approach me at my typewriter, they often gesture at my writing instruments and ask some variation of the same basic question: "what is *this* all about?" These interactions make me realize that other people may have some basic questions about poetry, such as fellow educators and academics. What is the point of introducing poetry to the public? My short answer is that poetry is a discursive practice (Fry, 2005) that fosters the exchanges of ideas and actions (Bean & Brennan, 2014). The long answer is more complex. The purpose of this chapter is to explore poetry as a conduit for dialog. This is an important examination to help readers consider how poetry can "spark" conversation. This chapter first explores the transactional nature of poetry, using Poetry On Demand as an example. The next section analyzes the various ways that writers and readers engage with verse, by examining the "process," "product," and "practice" of poetry. The final section conceptualizes poetry as a conduit for dialogue between the ethnographer and participant, and explores how poetry was used to frame the interviews for this dissertation. These examinations will hopefully help the reader better understand what is observable and discussable to me as a poet, and better prepare them to delve into my research methodology in the following chapter.

Poetry as Transaction

Though a novel practice, Poetry on Demand, or POD, is a shtick practiced by poets at public gatherings all over the United States, though it sometimes goes by different names. For National Poetry Month in 2015 the New York Mass Transit Authority (MTA) co-sponsored a

program called “Poetry in Motion: The Poet is In” at Fulton Station. “Twenty poets came down to Lower Manhattan on Thursday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. to write on-demand poems for anyone willing to wait in line, free of charge,” (Zarum, 2015) including Marie Howe, Sharon Olds, and Bob Holman. An article in the Village Voice remarked that the practice introduces poetry to an unfamiliar audience. “The event’s location, in a transit hub that provides access to ten train lines, offered the perfect opportunity for MTA riders to stumble upon it spontaneously” (Zarum, 2015). This means the guerilla methods of POD are an engaging practice, because people who don’t normally write poems unexpectedly find themselves in a transactional relationship with a living, breathing poet.

Chicago writer Kathleen Rooney agrees that POD makes poetry accessible, viewing the “spot-writing tradition” as “unpretentious encounters with poetry, where you would least expect it” (Borrelli, 2018). A Chicago Tribune article from 2018 follows the exploits of her program Poems While You Wait, charging strangers five-dollars-a-poem in hotel lobbies, museums, planetariums, farmers markets, theaters, comic book conventions, street festivals, weddings, and even the Symphony Center in downtown Chicago. Poems While You Wait is comprised of roughly two dozen poets, alternating in and out of various gigs. Co-organizer and poet Eric Plattner claims his craft has gone through an evolution, because the practice encourages him to find confidence in his work and treat the writing process as a discipline. This shows that poetry is transactional because the benefits go both ways: the participant is invited to participate in the oft-hidden composition process, and the poet is given the opportunity to hone their craft, widen their perspective, and grow their voice.

Just as there is no unified moniker for POD, there are no agreed-upon set of practices for the transaction. Some organizations ask for monetary compensation, some ask for donations to a cause, while others offer it as a gift to the community. This is also true of its discursive

transactions: some poets choose to read their composition out loud to the demanding patron, while others display the poems decoratively for patrons to find. However, there seem to be two standard practices for POD. First, a significant amount of POD writers use typewriters as a part of their shtick. In a news video covering the Okeechobee Music and Arts Festival in South Florida (Duarte, 2017), poet D. Michael Kingsford explains that the typewriters are part of the draw to patrons: "I've tried this with a quill and ink and it's just not as appealing. People don't approach you as much. It's a piece of Americana," he says, gesturing at the typewriter. "And it's this big, hulking, alien that everyone recognizes all the same. So people want to come check it out." While the typewriters are nostalgic for some bystanders, for others the experience is the first opportunity to see, hear, and touch a typewriter. "A 6-year-old told me it was like a piano," poet Zach Houston tells the San Francisco Gate while typing poems in an Oakland Art Gallery (Baker, 2009). "A keyboard with hammers attached. I'd never thought of that, but it's true. I thought it was a wonderful metaphor."

Second, POD sets an expectation that patrons dictate the theme of the poem. An article from the student paper at UCLA covers the efforts of the Poetry Bureau, who wrote poems for bystanders waiting to hear author David Sedaris speak at the campus Center for the Art of Performance. Student journalist Jessica Wolf (2016) got into the spirit and wrote the article covering the event in verse, explaining the process of POD:

> Share a brief note, a dream or a thought
> And the poets on hand whip it up on the spot.

Some patrons will say "write whatever you want," stating that they just want to be part of the creative process. However, even in this case the patron is still demanding what the outcome of the poem will look like. Regardless, the act of demanding necessitates that some type of transaction must take place between the poet and patron (Borelli, 2018), whether a monetary exchange occurs or not. The ending expectation of the discursive transaction is for the poet to

share the original composition with the patron, which can resemble many processes such as recitation or framing the piece on a board like a makeshift gallery. Once the poem has been shared, the demand has been met.

My experience tells me that a major draw of POD is that it provides insight into the process of a writer, because often the general public doesn't really understand what poets do (Bassett, 2013). I use the term "shtick" when referring to POD because it is simply one way to introduce the greater public to the culture of poetry; like slam, POD is a shtick to make poetry more accessible and relevant in peoples' lives. The Oxford Dictionary (2020) defines the Yiddish word shtick as "A gimmick, comic routine, style of performance, etc. associated with a particular person." When I am invited into a literacy space "to poem" (Borelli, 2018), the demand I am being tasked with performing might differ between a number of shticks I have stashed away in my briefcase.

Sometimes I am a writing instructor
which looks like passing out pencils and putting prompts on a chalkboard.
Sometimes I am a performer
which looks like speaking testimonies on a stage in front of rows of eyes.
Sometimes I am an organizer
which looks like setting up chairs and thump-testing every microphone.
Sometimes I am an editor
which looks like sitting in a circle and marking up drafts for feedback.
Sometimes I am a coach
which looks like starting and stopping poems while holding a stopwatch.
Sometimes I am an emcee
which means helping a teen up to the stage
hoping I announced her name correctly.

And sometimes I sit at a typewriter, staring at scribbled field notes, wondering how I can turn an interview into a poem. The next section uses POD as an example of how poetry simultaneously exists as a "process," "product," and "practice," revealing numerous implications relevant to the field of critical literacy. Then, the following section explores poetry as a vehicle for conducting interviews. Specifically, by understanding the innerworkings of how an interview

between participant and researcher produces a poem in POD, readers will better understand poetry is used as a vehicle for communicative community building.

Poetry as "Process," "Product," and "Practice"

POD was intriguing to explore in this dissertation because the shtick provided insight for how the discursive nature of poetry unfolds in multifaceted, multimodal ways. The typewriter provides a vehicle for the poet to practice the process of writing by producing a product that their participant keeps. The poem is more than a text: it becomes an artifact that represents a conversation from the past. To better assess the discursive value of poetry, I used Korina Jocson's (2008) "integrated framework for conceptualizing poetry as PPP.". The framework is significant to literacy researchers and practitioners because it demonstrates ways that poetry functions simultaneously as a "process," "practice," and "product." Jocson's Poetry as PPP framework is also an ideal organizational framework to consider for researchers interested in ways poetry frames discourse. PPP encourages us to view poetry as, first a process, referring to the ways that poets "learn through interaction." Second, poetry functions as a product, meaning the production of poetry causes writers and listeners to "construct meaning" and develop texts. Third, poetry exists as a practice, which relates to the critical activities and building of literacy communities established in classrooms and on stages. The seven narrative threads of this dissertation showcase these processes, products, and practices of poetry, and this chapter uses Poetry On Demand to give readers a closer look. In the following three sections, I reflect on my interactions with three fellow POD poets, to better explain the mutual benefits of using poetry discursively. By understanding the PPP framework of poetry, readers may gain better insight into what was interesting for me to observe and discuss in this dissertation.

Observing the Poetry Process

Jocson (2008) claimed that poetry is a process in that it helps readers learn relevant skills related to solving tasks independently. In the context of hip hop literacies (Richardson, 2006), pioneer hip hop radio personalities Stretch Armstrong and Bobbito Garcia (2015) referred to these skills as "techniques." Having "techniques" means possessing the orality skills to "rock a mic," but it can also refer to other multimodal literacy skills, like the digital literacy skills required to operate a sound mixer or the spatial literacy skills to graffiti your name in Wildstyle lettering on a wall. Having techniques is important to hip hop and spoken word practitioners, and according to Piirto (2009) it is important that poetry researchers hone their techniques too, because "in order to transform a field, the researcher, the creator, must have a mastery of the theory, the rules, the ways of knowing of that field, and also of the domain that is being used to transform it" (p. 85). Holbrook and Salinger (2006) provided a list of best practices for inviting guest poet performers into the classroom, so it only makes sense that poetic ethnographers should consider their techniques as well.

There are specific processes to learn in POD too. One technique that serves as a learning curve is the ability to compose a poem on a typewriter. I encouraged my younger friend Jasper to try POD who had never used a typewriter extensively. We chuckled as he fumbled with the keys and I showed him that even with my age and experience, I still chicken-finger my way through each composition. There are other "techniques" being rehearsed at POD: Jasper says he likes the process because it pivots the goal of a writing routine toward "*having* to write the poem." He is referring to the shift that serious writers make in their career, when they start seeing writing as a rehearsed habit, and not what he calls a "fleeting thing." He said about POD: "It is about having the discipline" to write a poem, "not about the inspiration striking." As an observer, I am interested in Jasper's writing habit, and I paid focus toward Jasper's poetry-related "literacy

events," (Heath, 1982) or the ways that Jasper used poetry as a vehicle to interact with a text. In addition to POD, Jasper also uses poetry in other discursive ways: he performs his poems in poetry slam competitions and spoken word open mics, and has spent the last couple years submitting his work to literary journals. The transactional nature of the literacy events I observed changed depending on each space and situation. I might have watched him fumble with keys in POD, but I also watched him give thoughtful feedback to a student writer in a poetry workshop. At a poetry slam, I watched him give brilliant testimonies of being a trans man in Midwestern America. Though the flavor of our conversations ranged from politics to gossip, I was always careful to document how the conversations were generated through literacy events.

Observing the Poetry Product

Jocson (2008) claimed that poetry can also be a product, meaning that artists create objects—or texts—that "gives form to one's experience" (p. 57). Poetry in the age of New Literacy Studies (Street, 1993) has seen poets crafting products through an increasingly diverse set of mediums ranging everywhere from chapbooks to digital audio recordings to video to posts on social media and even live performances. Conceptualizing poetry as a product can also help researchers conceptualize poetry as an artifactional form of "data" to "collect." Cammarota and Romero (2011) identified poetry as an ideal means of data collection to investigate classroom practices. There are many different ways to use verse as a data, which will be covered more in depth in the following chapter on methodology. One common way is to turn historical documents or transcription data into "found poetry," Prendergast (2009, xxviii) explains her process:

> To create found poetry, I read and reread the manuscripts, made notes, and delineated a number of occurring themes. I culled words and cut and pasted segments of conversation into specifically labeled files, then played poetically with the segments of conversation in an attempt to distill themes and write unique versions of them.

My friend Blaine flips the convention of the found poem: writing new poems on found objects. For POD, he likes to print his original poems on vintage postcards. He finds them at

thrift stores and rummage sales and many have notes scrawled on the back. The post cards are found products that represent a journey of strangers long ago. Blaine says he started collecting postcards because, "I was looking for a different, creative, unique outlet for my poetry." After typing his poems on the typewriter, Blaine usually takes a photo of the product with his smartphone and uploads the picture to his Instagram account. There, on social media, the initial analogue product transforms modes into a digitized product, which changes the way readers experience the poem. The mode changes once again, into an aural and embodied form, when he reads the poem allowed to patrons of POD while sitting in his wheelchair. "I love thinking of different ways to create and showcase poetry," he told me. While the topics of Blaine's poems explore every emotion, from love to loneliness, as a researcher I looked for ways these themes were conveyed through the product of the poem.

Observing the Poetry Practice

Jocson (2008) claimed that poetry is a practice, meaning it is a literary discipline "inextricably linked to culture and power structures in society" (Street, 1993, p. 7). This aspect of the practice is also related to reflexivity, because as Faulkner (2009) claimed, "Examinations of experience tell us a great deal about ideological formations, power, and the context" necessary to turn such forces into poetic structures (p. 189). Poetry serves as a vehicle for counternarratives, providing writers the ability to examine lived standpoints in the past and predict how things can happen in the future. Shidmehr (2009) adds that this change in perspective can also help researchers situate their multiple positionalities, explaining: "In this way a 'dialogic' relation is established between the self of the actor/researcher and the other of actor/researcher who responds to that act" (p. 103). The researcher forms a dialogic relationship between their roles throughout the research process, which fosters a creative dialogue between artist-as-inquirer and the artist who responds to such questions through the act of performance.

My conversations with fellow POD poet, Hiromi, were very discursive. As a researcher I was interested in examining the ways she uses poetry to stage dialogues with the public. She viewed POD as a form of playful community building. “Conversations with POD customers are valuable because they are collaborative attempts to produce poems,” she said. In these terms, POD poems are publicly co-constructed texts between people of different practices. She said, “It's important for passersby to experience poetry as embodiment: the production of poetry, especially in public spaces, needs to be experienced as spectacle, as performance, so that the challenges of production can be appreciated.” This perspective posits the poet as an ambassador for their craft, which frames POD as a form of civic engagement. In addition to POD, Hiromi hosted a series of poetry readings called “Poets 4 Unity.” She explained on her Facebook Page: “The Poets 4 Unity monthly reading series was held in response to the 2016 presidential election outcome. The series showcased diverse voices to build solidarity during those first five post-election months.” Hiromi is a first generation Japanese American woman, and believes poetry is a powerful way to combat the xenophobic attitudes of the Trump administration. I was a featured reader at one of her events, and as a witness I observed the potential of dedicating a space to poetry that critiques systems of power. Poetry events are also places for critically engaged citizens to meet one another, and continue the conversations heard on the mic. I saw many of my dissertation participants in attendance, all of whom use poetry in a variety of ways to engage the public. In parts II and III of this dissertation, I further explore the discursive relationships between practicing poets like Jasper, Blaine, and Hiromi, and the communities where they practice.

Poetry as Vehicle for Interviews

POD helped conceptualize what is observable to me as a poet, but it also provided a public model for formatting an interview with a participant. Before delving into my data

collection procedures in the following chapter, I wanted to take a moment to explain how poetry informed my framing of discussions with participants. Poetry is a fluid discursive practice, and as such, the nature of my conversations shifted over the course of this study. Appendix B includes the different structures of interview that I used in this study. Each section includes a summary of the theoretical underpinnings of each interview format. The summaries also describe my decision making process for choosing a format for a given participant. This is because my in-field experiences, like POD, gave me practice in problem-solving issues that arise during interactions with participants. Conducting qualitative research "on the go" meant I had to be flexible with the timing, settings, and tone of my interviews. The availability of my participants' time was often uncertain until the moment of the interview in some cases. In others, unforeseen changes at a poetry event forced me to adjust the planned protocol. Alter (2019) explained:

> Poets, in the popular imagination, are solitary figures who spend long hours in isolation, waiting for inspiration to strike. In reality, they're more likely rushing to faculty meetings, digging out from under unanswered emails and maybe—if they're lucky—squeezing in an hour of reading or writing. (p. 1)

This public misconception of time and the poet's role turned out to be a significant point of exploration in this dissertation. Since travel and time played a significant role in the availability of my participants, I decided to consider how 1) obstacles and 2) opportunities dictated which protocol I deem appropriate to capture our dialogue with one another. For example, I faced an obstacle in planning my structured interview with poet Kaveh Akbar because he was unsure of how much time he could provide, since he was an organizer of the event we were attending together. Inevitably, we had to cancel our interview and instead talk on the phone. Since both the timing and context of our interview changed, I switched to a more semi-structured style because the reception created a need for me to rephrase some questions, and I now had more time to add follow-up questions since Kaveh had more availability. My interactive interview with Jonathan Brown, in contrast, was an example of an opportunity. I was initially

going to send the New Orleans artist an email of five questions to respond to, but I was then afforded an opportunity to conduct a lengthy interactive interview with him when he crashed in my guest room on his way to his hip hop show in Kansas City. The context of our interview changed because he asked me if we could feature our conversation on his podcast, and therefore, we altered the structure of our interview so that we both played a more reciprocal role as discussants. By being flexible with my interview plans, I was able to seize an opportunity to have a more authentic, constructive dialogue with a participant. For more information, I include the criteria for interview types included in this study in the table below (Appendix B).

Meeting the Demand

When considering the discursive nature of poetry, I like to think about a poem called "Valentine for Ernest Man" (Nye, 1994). Naomi Shihab Nye's poem tells the story of a man named Ernest who once insisted that she write him a poem. She tongue-and-cheekily mocks him in the first line of his poem, stating, "You can't order a poem like you order a taco," implying that no patron is entitled to exploit the labor and creative attention of poets. However, the poem takes a turn in the second stanza:

> Still, I like your spirit.
> Anyone who says, "Here's my address,
> write me a poem," deserves something in reply.
> So I'll tell a secret instead:
> poems hide. In the bottoms of our shoes,
> they are sleeping. They are the shadows
> drifting across our ceilings the moment
> before we wake up. What we have to do
> is live in a way that lets us find them.

The poem ends with a declaration that "maybe if we re-invent whatever our lives give us / we find poems" (Nye, 1994). This notion of reinterpreting the world to find poetry encapsulates the aim of poetic inquiry. When I am sitting at a typewriter at a farmer's market or outside a

musical festival, and a stranger stumbles up to my booth, I think of how I can alter my life in a way that will let me find a poem in their story.

In 2018 I received an unsolicited email from a patron I met at an arts festival in Central Indiana. The email read:

> I want to gush on Adam Henze for a minute. He wrote a poem for my sister and me at the 4th Street Art Festival in Bloomington last Saturday. My sister Becky lives in Bloomington and has primary familial responsibility for my 91-year-old parents, who live in Bell Trace Senior Living Facility. All three were in an automobile accident a week before. All were sore and traumatized, and my mom broke two bones in her hand. Amazingly, the injuries were not worse. We asked for a poem about our parents. After our brief interview, we went to enjoy the art and came back to collect our wonderful poem.
>
> Adam asked that we let him know our parents' reaction. Adam, they loved the poem and they were touched to the point of tears. Your words expressed just what we were feeling. I am attaching both the poem and a photo of my parents.
>
> Thank you for touching our lives in such a precious way.

She included a photo of the poem, one of roughly a dozen I had written that day. I don't remember the woman's name, but it is touching that I could turn a story about their family into an artifact they might keep forever.

> Considering Strength
> By Adam Henze
>
> Dad used to plant trees in his youth.
> Mom carried water and taught us how
> to cultivate earth and soil.
> We've never known them to be fragile.
> Only strong, like a classic car frame.
> Vehicles today crumple under any weight.
> Like last week when Becky T-boned that
> Jeep that just pulled out of nowhere like
> life can change like that, you know?
> Beth flew in, what a blessing, and
> thankfully every hand held gripped back.
> Strength like sorting seeds through fingers.
> We're not yet ready to let go.

Remixing Frankenstein

In which the poet: situates the practice of poetic inquiry; explores using "(re)mixed methods" as a vehicle for data collection and analysis; and uses the metaphor of Frankenstein to situate the landscape of hip hop as a place for makers.

For the past 20 minutes the only landmarks outside my window have been corn fields and grain silos, but the GPS navigation on my smartphone swears to me there is a school just ahead. After passing a number of roads with numbers, and not names, I turn into the parking lot of a middle school. I open the email on my phone, to double check whether this remote location is the correct place, but that worry subsides when I see a man holding a sign in front of the school. He is wearing a tattered, tan suit and a Boris Karloff-style mask of Frankenstein's Creature—with the green, stitched skin, iron bolts, and flattop head made famous by makeup artist Jack Pierce (Skal, 1993). The man is wearing an "Indiana Humanities" T-shirt underneath his soiled blazer, and the sign in his hands reads:

> FRANKENFEST:
> ALL DAY READ-A-THON OF MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN

"You must be Adam," the man says through his ghoulish latex mask.

"Looks like I am in the right place," I say, shaking his hand.

The man removes his mask, and I am shocked when he introduces himself as the principal of the school. I have probably visited 100 schools and universities in my years as a teaching artist, and often my interactions with administrators are brief-but-friendly exchanges before they resign into the depths of their office to handle more pressing issues.

"We are happy to have you," he says, escorting me into the lobby. "We live so far out in the sticks, we don't get a lot of opportunities for guests or cultural events." Fortunately, in 2018 this school was awarded a grant to host a "Frankenfest," part of a statewide initiative by Indiana Humanities to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the publication of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

The New York Times described the Hoosier State as the global ground zero of the bicentennial celebration:

> This is Frankenstein's year. The novel's 200th anniversary has inspired a cavalcade of exhibitions, performances and events around the world, from Ingolstadt, the Bavarian home of Victor Frankenstein's fictional lab, to the hell mouth of Indiana, which in a bid to become the epicenter of American Franken-frenzy, has held more than 600 events since January.

The bid in reference refers to a $300,000 grant awarded to Indiana Humanities by the National Endowment of Humanities, to host "Frankenfests" at schools, museums, and libraries across the state in 2018. I was one of dozens of scholars awarded a spot on Indiana Humanities' Speakers Bureau, a network of interdisciplinary professionals willing to serve as guest speakers at the sites of Frankfest grant recipients. This is how a rural middle school decided to bring a poet from the city to present his hip hop-infused lecture and writing workshop: "FrankenSlam: Where the Poetry is Alive! It's Alive!"

I also arrived at the school playing the role of creative ethnographer, curious to see how students and school employees used the metaphors of Frankenstein to situate their own identities. So what does the "epicenter of American Franken-frenzy" look like, as reported from the "hell mouth of Indiana?" When I walk into the school the floor of the lobby is filled with student-made Frankenstein Creatures. As I wait for my visitor's badge, I snap photos of the creations on my smartphone: snaggle-toothed brutes made of pipe cleaners, flower petals, rubber gloves, garden tools, pumpkins, Pringles cans, cardboard boxes, garbage sacks, old clothes, plastic Mountain Dew bottles, clay pots, silverware, cotton balls, construction paper, egg cartons, old gym equipment, sawed-off table legs, paper mache newstrips, ribbons, rope, dinner plates, paper towel tubes, Halloween decorations, stuffed teddy bear heads, bird feathers, stripped corn cobs, splashes of paint, duct tape, and stuck-on googly eyes.

The principal then escorts me through the library, where they have dimmed the lights to transform the space into a crypt. There is a medical dummy on a table, costumed as a gruesome cadaver, surrounded by corn-syrup-covered medical instruments donated by a local doctor. Cobwebs are spread across the library books and every surface is covered with artificial candles. A podium stands in a corner of the spooky room, where volunteers and a flashlight take turns reading the 1831 version of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein in its entirety—the only mandatory stipulation of the Frankenfest grant. It is too dark to take photos, so I scribble descriptions of all the images in my field journal as fast as I can.

In the hallway I notice that every single teacher is wearing their Indiana Humanities Frankenstein shirt. It is an informal observation of a pattern, in the form of an image, which is the type of thing inquiring poets search for. The shirts imply that this school runs as a unified collective body, with values clearly communicated between principal, staff, and students. This school is electrified with excitement. One teacher is dressed like Elsa Lanchester's Bride of Frankenstein, with a towering black-and-white wig, white sheet gown, and caked makeup. Another teacher wears stage makeup to make it look like her face is made from two half-heads stitched together into one. These images stick out to me as a poetic ethnographer, because they serve as counter-narratives to the common depictions of rural Indiana as a void, cultureless space. Though I have stories to bring into this space, clearly this space has its own stories to tell that deserve to be heard by people on the other side of the cornfield.

Finally the principal brings me to the school gymnasium, where risers are set up to seat 400 middle school students. I take in the vastness of the performance space, and my heart gets hit by lightning. An English teacher helps me set up the mic stand and AV equipment, and I run through my setlist of poems in my head. While I'm preparing the instruments I need to perform spoken word poetry, I am also preparing my instruments I need as an ethnographer: my stack of

descriptions of the research study for this dissertation; my documents of informed consent and assent; a small video camera to capture my exchanges with students on film. In this rural school gymnasium, I'm not just performing poetry. I'm not just teaching poetry. I am conducting "poetic inquiry" (Prendergast, 2008)

This chapter uses the metaphor of Frankenstein to conceptualize several things relevant to my dissertation. First, I use metaphors to help conceptualize the practice of "poetic inquiry" (Prendergast, 2008), which served as the methodological vehicle of this qualitative study. Second, I use metaphors to help explain a hip hop-infused creative analytic practice (Richardson, 1999) that I call "(re)mixed methods." Third, I use metaphors to help explain my processes for data collection and analysis in this dissertation. I frame this methods section with stories from the Frankenfest, in hopes that it will help readers consider ways that spoken word can reanimate interest in relics from the traditional English Literature canon.

Poetic Inquiry

In 2019 I "performed" some of my findings from FrankenSlam at the International Symposium for Poetic Inquiry (ISPI), in Nova Scotia, Canada. The biennial conference was first hosted at the University of British Columbia in 2007 by Monica Prendergast, with guidance from mentoring professor Carl Leggo (Wiebe, 2015). The focus of Prendergast's postdoctoral research was an arts-based inquiry practice she calls "poetic inquiry" (Prendergast, 2009). Prendergast surveyed thousands of social science journals, and found 182 instances where poems were used as a vehicle to drive inquiry in some form. She found that researchers in fields as diverse as nursing, criminology, gender studies, developmental psychology, social work, and cultural anthropology, used poetry in their work a variety of ways. Some used poetry as a form of thick description (Smith, 2002); some used poetry as a method for taking field notes (Cahnmann, 2003); some used poetic inquiry as a way to creatively analyze interview transcripts (Luce-

Kapler, 2004). In a personal interview, (Oct, 2019) Prendergast told me that she started the ISPI as a convening space so that scholars from diverse fields could creatively present their work through the shared language of poetry.

Within the area of critical qualitative inquiry (Denzin, 2017), poetic inquiry could be situated as a creative analytic practice (Richardson, 1999) where the researcher utilizes the technique of a poet. Countless researchers have used poetry to "play" with their data, spawning a number of overlapping terms such as "research poetry" (Faulkner, 2009), "poetic narrative" (Glesne, 1997), "ethnopoetics" (Rothenberg, 1994), and "autoethnographic verse" (Ricci, 2003). In this dissertation, I employed Prendergast's (2009) preferred term "poetic inquiry" as "an umbrella term to cover the multiple terminologies" (p. xix) that have been used to describe poetic practices in qualitative inquiry. I used poetic inquiry in a variety of ways in this dissertation, and this section is meant to provide readers with an introduction to the possibilities of using poetry as a vehicle for qualitative research.

In her survey of the multidisciplinary field, Prendergast (2009) identified three distinct "voices" evident in poetic inquiry. These three voices relate to a notion of who the source of the poem is, which are 1) *Vox Theoria*, or "literature-voiced poems," 2) *Vox Autobiographica,* or "researcher-voiced poems, and 3) *Vox Participare*, or "participant-voiced poems." This dissertation was steered by all three of these voices. First, the theory of this dissertation was grounded with the language of poets, including the diverse theoretical perspectives of poets like Audre Lorde, Edward Hirsch, Matsuo Bashō, Gloria Anzaldúa, Richard Hugo, and bell hooks. Second, this dissertation was framed by my own autoethnographic narratives of visiting literacy spaces as a teaching artist. FrankenSlam is just one of dozens of stories about spoken word pedagogy in this study. Third, this dissertation contains a wealth of poems meant to represent the voices of participants. Participant-voiced poems were sometimes constructed through data

collection, whereas I collected poems from a poetry unit or asked participants to write a poem. Participant-voiced poems were also sometimes constructed through data analysis, whereas I employed a poetic technique to transform a standard piece of data into a poem.

This study is an opportunity to synthesize the many processes I've learned for inquiry by blending my ethnographic and poetic voices (Faulkner, 2009). Considering that the poetry slam community is a network of thousands of creative artists of various disciplines, it is surprising that relatively no studies of slam culture and spoken word pedagogy exist that employ creative analytic practices. Few slammers in my social circle have used poetic representation in their academic writing or have attended ISPI. I argue that a cross-discourse between spoken word pedagogues and the poetic inquiry research community could be mutually enriching, and it is my aim to use this dissertation to set the stage for that conversation.

In 2018 I visited Frankenfests in over a dozen literacy spaces across the Midwest, including public schools, private schools, universities, libraries, arts festivals, and even the basement of a prison chapel. I collected data in many of these places, in many forms, to create a multimodal data set. The primary data sources for this study consisted of: observation, both in and out of literacy spaces, b) interviews and focus studies with participants, including students, educators, and poets, (see Table B at the end of this sec), c) written responses to prompts, such as poems and short reflections, d) audio and video recordings of activities, discussions, and performances, e) historical and public documents, both textual and digital, and f) posts on social media and other internet forums. In the next section, I demonstrate how I "remixed" all these data sources, using metaphors created by teenage writer Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley. One thing I mentioned in my presentation at ISPI is Young's (2008) claim that Frankenstein has stood the test of time because the creature serves as a malleable metaphor for writers to pick up. In the next section, I use metaphors present in Frankenstein to reframe the methods of this study as a

hip hop literacies practice, in hopes of unifying the conceptual paradigms between poetic inquiry and spoken word pedagogy.

(Re)mixed Methods

In his poem "Dear Dr. Frankenstein," Jericho Brown writes an open letter to the fictional scientist, saying he understands what it is like to bring an unwieldy being to life through the constructive process of creative writing. Standing in the auditorium, with hundreds of middle schoolers' eyes watching me, I perform the poem like I am cackling researcher in a laboratory:

> Dear Dr. Frankenstein
>
> I, too, know the science of building men
> Out of fragments in little light
> Where I'll be damned if lightning don't
>
> Strike as I forget one
> May have a thief's thumb,
>
> Another, a murderer's arm,
> And watch the men I've made leave
> Like an idea I meant to write down,
>
> Like a vehicle stuck
> In reverse, like the monster
>
> God came to know the moment
> Adam named animals and claimed
> Eve, turning from heaven to her
>
> As if she was his
> To run. No word he said could be tamed.
>
> No science. No design. Nothing taken
> Gently into his hand or your hand or mine,
> Nothing we erect is our own.

A performative, embodied recitation of Jericho Brown's poem is just one example of how I use spoken word to galvanize student interest by "remixing" metaphors from canonical literature. A fusing of "verse, music, and theatre" (Parmar & Bain, 2007) spoken word inherently exists as a blended hybrid of words conveyed through images, sounds, and movements. Spoken

word transcends many mediums and is practiced in diverse spaces, so I've been curious about the notion of using mixed media in a study related to spoken word pedagogy: after all, if spoken word exists on paper, on video and compact disc, as a live performance, and even as a meme on the Internet, then the urge for a researcher to collect multiple forms of data derived from multiple methods makes sense.

Still, with its many voices and many forms of being, to me the narratives of spoken word pedagogy beg to be told in ways that abscond from the singularly-voiced, linear narrative often seen in classroom ethnography. So, in this dissertation I employed a creative methodological vehicle that I termed *(re)mixed methods*: that is, qualitative methods that invite one to 1) visit a variety of sites rather than a few places, 2) use varying methods to collect data in varying forms, 3) talk to participants from multiple perspectives, rather than focusing on a limited expertise, and 4) utilize multiple research voices, both in the sense of style and the method of inquiry. My study contained a blend of qualitative processes, ranging from critical qualitative ethnography (Denzin, 2017), performative autoethnography (Spry, 2001), action research (2009), participant action research (Cammarota & Fine, 2008), historical research (Chang, 2005), comparative literature analysis (Hirshfield, 2015), and critical discourse analysis (Wodak & Fairclough, 2013).

My primary reason for constructing a "multi-voiced," multi-method dissertation was to explore my shifting role of "participant observer" (Fisher, 2007) in various spaces—from teacher, to co-writer, to observer, to witness. At FrankenSlam in rural Indiana, I was a visitor in a new place, interacting with participants I had never met before. I adopted a wandering autoethnographer voice to tell my story, which would be a different voice when talking about places and people that I know. Such contexts caused me as a poet to shift my "reflexive lenses" (Brady, 2009). By vocalizing the shifts in my reflexive process in the narratives of this

dissertation, my hope is that the reader will gain a better understanding of ways that poetic inquiry can be used as a form of critical praxis for educators and researchers (Freire, 1970).

In hip hop terms, the hybrid structure of this study could be conceptualized as a product of "remix literacies." Gainer and Lapp (2010) define "remix" in literacy terms as a creative process where "authors thoughtfully recycle bits and pieces of many texts to cobble together new meanings" (p. 19). Gainer and Lapp note that the practice is similar to the ways that academics reorganize the claims of other scholars to "contextualize" and "build upon prior meanings." Spoken word, itself, has become a popular vehicle for multimodal literacy educators who conceptualize a "text" as a product of malleable modality (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The collage of narratives that built this dissertation highlight ways that the spoken word community uses remixing to "recycle" the "reading" of "texts": a teacher may play video of a poem to inspire students to generate a written response, or students may be asked to read hip hop lyrics to serve as a catalyst for spoken discussion. Stedman (2012) advocates for the pedagogic development of a *remix literacy*, "where students' multiple angles to approaching composition projects should be encouraged" (p. 108). I encourage readers to treat this dissertation like the buttons of an old CD player: rewind if you need to repeat and ponder a line; pause and study the liner notes if you need to learn some words; or skip ahead and come back when you're ready to nod along. This "collage-like" text used narrative threads, such as my FrankenSlam stories, to stitch together disparate parts into one body.

In the remainder of this chapter, I further conceptualize "remixing" as data collection and analysis processes. Extending the arguments of Elizabeth Young's *Black Frankenstein*, I believe the remix can be explained by likening hip hop to the cultural history of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. According to Young (2008):

> *Frankenstein* and its legacy have been the subject of substantial amounts of scholarly and popular writing, but little serious attention has been paid to the historical specificities of

> its place in American culture, and virtually none of its racial resonances in the United States. I take up the question of what happens to the Frankenstein story in America, defining that story in its most basic form as having three distinct elements: a monster is amalgamated from body parts; a monster is reanimated from corpses; and a monster engages in revolt against a creator (p. 4 - 5).

In the next three sections I use three metaphors from Frankenstein mythos to explore (re)mixed methods for data collection and analysis.

The Data of Amalgamation

Hip hop is constructed through amalgamation in several different ways. Merriam-Webster defines amalgamation as "the action or process of uniting or merging two or more things" (2017). One famous text created through amalgamated construction is the rock-and-roll instrumental *Frankenstein* by the Edgar Winter Group. Though the song is known for its hulking, lumbering refrain, in 2010 Edgar Winter explained that the origin of the song is more closely rooted in the theme of amalgamation.

> It didn't have a name. … And 'Frankenstein' was this big opus that was 15 or 20 minutes and had all of these parts. … And I was talking to Rick Derringer about it … and Rick said, 'Maybe we could edit that instrumental into something that would be usable.'… That's basically what we did. So we were sitting there with pieces of it lying all over the control room, draped over the backs of chairs and overflowing the console and the couch. And we were trying to figure out how to put it all back together. And then, at that point, the drummer, Chuck Ruff, mumbled the immortal words, 'Wow, man, it's like Frankenstein' (Synthopia, 2010).

Although Frankenstein is a 70s rock instrumental, the act of slicing and dicing sounds is a notable element of hip hop known as "sampling." Demers (2003) defines the "music borrowing" practice of sampling as "a digital process in which pre-recorded sounds are incorporated into the sonic fabric of a new song" (p. 41).

Amalgamation can also be found in the lyricism of the emcees, who use language to remix pieces of familiar knowledge to craft new narratives. As Young (2008) explains, "Like the Frankenstein monster, metaphor emerges through amalgamation" (p. 69) Citing Richard's (1965) work, she claims that metaphor is the act of combining two parts into one to create one concept.

In Jerhico Brown's (2014) poem *Dear Dr. Frankenstein*, the narrator writes an open letter to the mad doctor to express that as a writer he also "knows the science of building men / out of science in little light." Using Richard's terms, the idea being sought in this poem ("the tenor") is that a writer is considering the ways that the narratives he produces "get away from him" or "take on a life of their own." The tenor of the writer's experience is then connected to the "vehicle," or comparative concept: for Brown, writing in this fashion is very similar to the dynamic of Dr. Frankenstein creating something in a lab which ends up defying its creator. By coalescing the tenor and the vehicle, Brown essentially presents one concept to us as the writer-as-mad-scientist, who cannot contain the creature they have created.

As a research design, (re)mixed methods resembles the amalgamation process because I collected many disparate texts from different sources: interview transcripts; prompted writing responses; generated poetry; quotations from interviews on podcasts and in the media; observations of performances; both in person and seen on social media; excerpts from emails and phone conversations; and data from social media such as status updates; conversations on Twitter and Facebook; memes; and poems posted on Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and Instagram. Amalgamation was also evident in the disparate expertise of participants, who included school administrators, support staff, parents, advocates, and even fans, in addition to poets and educators, and in the diverse amount of sites that range between educational spaces, festivals, bars, coffee shops, and even the parking lot of a prison. At FrankenSlam, I collected student poems on looseleaf paper, video of the presentation, and I took photos at the school. Then I synthesized all the pieces with field notes from my journal, and I spent some time freewriting about my visit while the memory was still fresh in my mind.

Amalgamation also framed the way I coded my data. My process for analyzing poems and interview transcripts was similar to my process of listening to an emcee: I searched for "hot

bars." A bar is a unit of measure in hip hop lyricism, representing one line of a standard 16 bar "verse." When an emcee packs a bar with wit or wordplay, it is known as a "hot" bar. Often the success of an emcee is determined by how many excellent "bars" they have in the span of their verse. At poetry slams and hip hop shows, a clever bar often elicits a visceral response, of laughs, claps, snaps, stomps, hoots, hollers, screams, and shouted affirmations. Sometimes a person will exclaim, "Rewind!" If the emcee obliges, they will repeat the bar. During my interviews with poet and hip hop artist Cuban Hernandez, he would occasionally shout "BARS!" whenever one of us phrased a sound argument in a fresh, concise way. I wanted to capture these tight lines. I scanned my data transcripts like the verse of a hip hop song, looking and listening for hot bars: insightful nuggets of wisdom to pluck out, replant, and construct a narrative around. A common quality of an excellent bar is that it showcases a vivid metaphor. I also listened for ways my participants used metaphors and similes. Highlighting these figurative images in the telling of my dissertation became a creative way to showcase the perspectives of my participants.

Finally, amalgamation is evident in the way I reported findings. In some cases, I sat down and co-constructed data with participants, analyzed it as co-researchers, and pieced our stories together into one narrative. In other cases, I deconstructed participant writing and interview transcripts through a multi-textual process called "cut-up methods" (James, 2009). I playfully cut and pasted pieces of data, and looked to see how the pieces fit together. James (2009) argues that cut-up methods are a way to "engage a mode of critical and aesthetic recycling of cultural resources, and reflect a function of scholarship in which citations, quotes, allusions, and so on, facilitate the upkeep of a body of knowledge" (p. 59) The sporadic chapters of this dissertation were constructed by numerous stories from different spaces. Like Frankenstein's Creature, it is a body stitched together from several small pieces. This amalgamated text may switch from prose to poetry to open letter, but each piece builds the

bigger story of my dissertation. Though it is one body, its chapters have been pieced out to publishers of various mediums such as peer review journals, literary journals, newspapers, podcasts, online media, YouTube videos, and social media.

The Data of Reanimation

The second Frankenstein-like element that hip hop encompasses is the notion of reanimation. In the same way that Victor Frankenstein captured lightning to reanimate his creature composed of dead parts, DJ QBert explains that the art of the remix allows turntablists to have a conversation with artist ancestors who came before them (Pray, 2001). A commonly cited example of reanimation is the legacy of Clyde Stubblefield in hip hop, who was known as James Brown's "Funky Drummer." According to Katz (2012), the upbeat drumloops by Stubblefield would inevitably become the most sampled sounds of all time. Iconic songs such as "Fight the Power" by Public Enemy, "Let Me Ride" by Dr. Dre, "Mama Said Knock You Out" by LL Cool J, "Run's House" by Run DMC and "South Bronx" by Boogie Down Productions included his drumming as the skeletal beat of the track. In her novel Frankenstein, teenage writer Mary Shelley sampled lines by influential poets such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, John Milton, and William Shakespeare. Shelley's references to her literary predecessors frame literary allusion as an act of sampling in parlance with hip hop literacies.

Emcees also showcase the ability of reanimation. A common practice for poets and rappers is to take the phrases, themes, metaphors, tropes, and images of preceding artists and breathe new life into their words through the act of allusion and by "flipping" common utterances. In "Wesley's Theory," the opening track to Kendrick Lamar's seminal hip hop album *To Pimp a Butterfly,* the emcee reanimates the words and sounds of influential Black artists: this is done in the sampling of Boris Gardner; in the lyric references to Black celebrities like Wesley Snipes and Richard Pryor; in the featuring of music veteran George Clinton and respected

contemporary bassist Thundercat; and in the inclusion of voiceover by mentors like Dr. Dre (Henze & Hall, 2018). In the same way that Civil War era writers like Ambrose Pierce and Herman Melville conversed with Mary Shelley by creating their own man-made monstrosities (in "Moxon's Master" and "The Bell Tower," respectfully), emcees use figurative language to revive the concepts created by the artists who influenced their worldview. Many participants of FrankenSlam also used metaphors popularized by Mary Shelley to personify the monsters of their lives: bullies; grief; chronic anxiety; greed; suicidal ideation; fear of academic failure.

Reanimation affected the way I collected the data for this dissertation in the form of "prompts." Writing prompts are a staple of most creative writing curricula, but Certo (2004) claims that prompts function differently when they include a "poetry link."

> I believe a poetry link can best be thought of as a writing suggestion, statement, or assignment that stems from an original text. It is different from a traditional writing prompt in that students and the teacher cocreate it. Instead of reading a poem to students and simply saying, "Now write one of your own," some time is spent in class helping students brainstorm ideas for writing by examining the particular poem. This is an authentic prewriting activity. (p. 268)

In my classroom practices, as well as my data collection methods, I often cocreated prompts with participants, using a poem to generate a poetry link. Sometimes participants shared poems that were meaningful to them during interviews, but typically such discussions were in response to a poem in a classroom exercise. In some FrankenSlam visits I had the opportunity to visit classrooms and foster some small group writing activities. One poem I often used was Lisel Mueller's "Triumph of Victory," which is told in the voice of an adult Mary Wolstonecraft Shelley reflecting on the death of her mother, father, children, and husband. I encouraged participants to steer the conversation, by pointing out themes or literary devices they liked in the poem, or by highlighting lines in the poem that resonate with them personally. For example, my poet friend Mariangela loved the lines: "You don't trust the heart / though you define death / as the absence of heartbeat." To create a poetry link, I might write these lines on the board and ask

participants to respond, inviting them to use the quotation to steer their creative writing. Quoting an author is just one way to construct a poetry prompt, as authors could respond to the style, structure, or sentiment of the poem, or employ a similar technique, like writing a poem in the voice of an influential person. Reanimation is evident in (re)mixed methods because it invites participants to rise and participate in the study process.

Finally, animation was evident in my data analysis, because I used poetic devices to proverbially help bring the data to life. Tedlock (1983) advocates for transcribing interview data in a way that captures the oral/aural nature of spoken conversation and presentation. While listening to audio recordings to interviews, I let the cadences, tones, and rhythms of my participants voices steer where I might place a linebreak in the middle of a line, to indicate a pause in thought or shift in perspective. Other times I sculpted the shape of interview transcriptions into "poetry clusters" (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009), turning participant responses into artifacts that readers can study from different angles. In some cases I took a black Sharpie marker to interview transcripts, to create a blackout poem (Stone, 2017), highlighting small utterances in interviews to glean new meanings. I "played" (Richardson, 1997) with data in many ways in this dissertation, and I made sure to make my processes for constructing data poems as transparent as possible. Like Victor Frankenstein, I spent a great deal of time fixated on the aesthetic of my "creations."

The Data of Revolt

The creature rose up against his father, the neglectful Victor Frankenstein, personifying the ways that products of an oppressive society revolt against said oppressive society. Hip hop also exists as a rebellious attack against oppressive structures in the world. Chang (2005) highlights the political importance of influential groups like NWA and Public Enemy, whose music challenged authorities and gatekeepers in the education system, the military, healthcare,

and even in the music industry. To share a specific example, Public Enemy's influential song "Fight the Power" lambasts people in power in several ways: Chuck D's brutal lyrics assault the government, the police, and the media, while producers The Bomb Squad flipped music conventions on their heads by stacking samples in such a way that some listeners referred to the track more as noise than a song.

Poetry slam was also created in the spirit of revolt against New Criticism—an academic movement dedicated to form and structure, which arguably made the culture of poetry inaccessible to the public (Gioia, 1991). Marc Smith (Feb, 2011) explained in a personal conversation with me that when he started writing poetry, he didn't feel welcome at stuffy academic readings. On the flip side, he also felt like he had to hide his poems from his construction worker buddies. The "slam" borrowed language from baseball (Aptowitz, 2008) and was staged in a small bar in Uptown Chicago. In its inception, it was a stark contrast to the podium in a chalky university classroom. While folks in academic circles were declaring poetry dead in the 1990s, (Goia, 1991), spoken word circumvented the academy by reaching the public: at festivals such as Lollapalooza and AfroPunk; on television channels like HBO and MTV; on radio stations like NPR; online archives like IndieFeed; on independent presses like Write Bloody and Penmanship Books; and even distributors using YouTube and social media like Button Poetry and Write About Now. Although MFA programs, literary journals, and secondary school curricula have become much more inclusive of slammers and their work (McDaniel, 2000), these works still rebel against the most criticized parts of the traditional canon such as eurocentrism, essentialism, dryness, and inaccessibility.

In the spirit of Frankenstein, (re)mixed methods also rebel against their creator. In interviews, I often let participants steer the conversation away from my intended research focus (Tanaka et al., 2014). Instead of insistently redirecting participants back to the topic, I leaned into

these deviations. In the coding process I turned my focus instead toward searching for concepts that could serve as connective tissue between dissimilar thoughts. I also searched for perspectives in the coding process that challenged my own preconceived narratives. For example, I was surprised by the level of excitement for Frankenfest at the rural middle school, which made me reconsider the deficit narratives I might possess as a visiting researcher. By writing about these fricative discourses that challenged me, surprises "sprang forth" from this dissertation and took on a life of their own. I encouraged these tiny revolts to grow into larger areas of focus for this dissertation, and readers will see that I dedicated considerable attention to how participants used poetry to combat deficit narratives. Readers will find dozens of overlapping themes in this dissertation. The fragmented and scattered nature of the methods stand at odds against research conventions that often favor linearity and unified analysis.

Victor Frankenstein never held himself accountable for his Creature, and the stampeding revolt of torches and pitchforks that followed. In this dissertation, I tried to learn from Victor's mistakes, so I used poetic inquiry as a vehicle for accountability. I let revolting voices challenge me to steer my own processes of self interrogation. These reflexive explorations were threaded throughout the reporting of my data. I craft narratives about the missteps I made as a researcher, the ethical debates toiling in my brain, and hard moments—like retelling the time I hurt a student's feelings or when I struggled to produce because I was wrestling with depression. By sharing the personal challenges I faced as an artist educator and paralleling them with the experiences of participants, I aim to present a complex, intertwining analysis that emboldens our understanding of the needs of artist educators in our society.

Talking the Candle Down

In a middle school gymnasium in rural Indiana, 400 young writers constructed poems about monsters, beasts, ghouls, ghosts, and specters. The arms and legs of teenagers were

sprawled across bleachers and the basketball court, and I stood in the middle transfixed by the sight of hundreds of pencils quaking with fervor. I wanted to take a panoramic shot of the scene with my smartphone, but student after student approached me, tugging my sleeve and asking if I would listen to their poem. The room was filled with curious, inquisitive wanderers, all using poetry as a process for inquiry. Writers have used poetry for thousands of years to ask questions, as evidenced in Lorine Niedecker's poem, "Who was Mary Shelley?"

> who was Mary Shelley
> What was her name
> before she married?
>
> She eloped with this Shelley
> she rode a donkey
> till the donkey had to be carried.
>
> Mary was Frankenstein's creator
> his yellow eye
> before her husband was to drown
>
> Created the monster nights
> after Byron, Shelley
> talked the candle down.
>
> Who was Mary Shelley?
> She read Greek, Italian
> She bore a child
>
> Who died
> and yet another child
> who died.

At FrankenSlam, I prompted young poets to write about something they fear, whether they are afraid to become Victor or whether there is something monstrous lurking in their lives. So many students lined up to read their poem to the student body that administrators had to cut off the line. I snapped a quick image of the line on my smartphone before it dispersed, one of several pieces of data I collected that day. As students filed out of the auditorium, I shuffled through my scattered stacks of consent forms, scribbled notes, and folded up poems. A small girl approached

me and handed me a piece of paper. On the paper there was a poem about a child. A ghost was chasing her. He chased her through the forest, through the streets, into her house, and down to her basement. The girl was fearful when the ghost approached her, but then he revealed himself to be her late father. The ghost said that he was proud of her, and that she didn't need to worry anymore. Like any striking poem, the story produced a million questions in my mind. I looked up to ask her one, but she had already gone.

A Poem's Worth

In which the poet: defends poetry as an engaging practice; and uses metaphors to situate poetry as a critical literacy.

When a poetry class in a maximum security prison is dismissed for the day, often there's a procession of writers who take a moment to pass by their teacher and explicitly thank them "for their time." It is a delicate parade that's humbled me over the years.

An arms-folded Foucauldian (1977) scholar might say that over-politeness is just an indication of a performative discipline instilled by the prison system . I can attest through my experience though, these thank you's are said with soft eyes and solemn voices. During these occasions I think about how "spending time" is a sentiment expressed as a transactional statement.

What is the worth of a poem? What is the value of poetry?

Some students tell me they take my class instead of attending Narcotics Anonymous, because they get more catharsis from their notebook than from counseling. It's a loaded statement, but who am I to argue with their testimonies? Other students tell me that class helps them express themselves better when they write letters to their family. A few of my students have created a working vocabulary bank of new words they have learned from reading poetry and talking about peer reviewed articles. Prison staff tell me some women come to my class because there's another woman they want to sit close to. I shrug and say that's how some of my friends started liking poetry too. Some administrators say that educational programming is good for prisoners because it gives them something to do to stay out of trouble. During these occasions I think about time as a commodity, and how it can be experienced as either "hard" or "hollow" depending on where you are.

One evening I arrive at the education building, and a woman I have never seen before meets me in the hallway with a fistful of keys. The usual coordinator I work with is out sick, so she leads me to my classroom and unlocks the door. “What class is this?” she asks.

“Poetry,” I say shyly.

She squints her right eye and tilts her head to the left. “Poultry?” she asks in high register. “Like chicken?” She wiggles her elbows ever so slightly.

I smile. “No, no,” I say. “Poetry. Like reading and writing a poem.” I gesture like an orator speaking at a podium.

She grimaces even more severely than when she conceptualized *poultry* class as a thing. “Poetry class?” she asks with a wince, and then walks away before I answer. This anecdote always makes me smile. I imagine that *poultry* class made some sort of sense to her. Barely. Maybe I was teaching incarcerated women to cook or sustain an urban farm. But poetry class? In prison? That is too silly to conceive.

While my run in with a befuddled prison turnkey is a fun story to tell at cocktail hour, it is sadly not an outlier tale. There is a pattern of numerous gatekeepers in my life who have been skeptical of the value of using poetry as a pedagogy: school principals; classroom teachers; college professors; academic journal editors; festival planners; conference organizers; journalists and other media producers; let alone, my parents’ friends. When I write academically about poetry, I am often encouraged to spend a substantial amount of my argument defending the worth of poetry.

In Defense of Poetry (Again)

In the book *The Hatred of Poetry* (2016), author Ben Lerner stated that the long held distrust of poetry is a reoccurring narrative, pointing to Plato’s *Repubic* as the “most influential attack on poetry in recorded history” (p. 17). He summarizes that Plato felt “there was no place

for poetry in the Republic because poets are rhetoricians who pass off imaginative projections as the truth and risk corrupting the citizens of the just city, especially the impressionable youth" (p. 17) This assertion has serious implications for scholars, because Plato's essential claim is that we must "defend language as the medium of philosophy from the unreason of poets who make stuff up as opposed to discovering genuine truths" (Lerner, 2016, p. 18).

As poet Muriel Rukeyser (1996) once said, "Anyone dealing with poetry and the love of poetry must deal, then, with the hatred of poetry, and perhaps even more with the indifference which is driven toward the center" (p. 9) This sentiment may help explain why "poetic representation" is viewed as academically suspect by some in the research community, and the researcher who coined the phrase claims that her work initially faced scrutiny related to the assumption that the methods were not systematic (Richardson, 1997). When ethnographer Laurel Richardson began representing transcription data in poetic stanzas and began adopting introspective lenses in her analysis, she claimed that some peers labeled her as unethical, undisciplined, and "anti-rationalist." Richardson (1997) later defended the rigor of the internal validity and member-checking processes of her study, which included "innumerable computer screen revisions, nine hard copy drafts, two critical readings by [a] professor, and two critiques of workshop participants" (p. 150) . Richardson was also accused of projecting her own persona onto her primary participant in the study, Louisa May, when transcribing her narrative, evoking Plato's claim that poets will conflate the truth to their own desire.

Considering the scrutiny poetry has faced spanning from ancient Greece to the modern day, it is no wonder I am constantly tasked with defending the value of using spoken word as a vehicle for exploring the world. There have been countless defenders of poetry throughout history, ranging from Romantic Percy Shelley to rapper Mos Def (Aptowicz, 2008), and my aim

was not to be reductive. Since a focus of this dissertation was on critical literacy (Lewison, Flint, & Sluys, 2002), I decided to defend poetry by exploring it as a vehicle for critical literacy.

When there is a struggle to clearly define what exists around us, poets often turn to metaphor to present concepts as clear images. Ideally, Scribner (1984) provided three metaphors for literacy: literacy as adaptation; literacy as power; and literacy as a-state-of-grace. Scribner complicated common notions of literacy by considering how functionality is measured and questioning how diverse social demands change the execution of literate actions. To better understand how literacy metaphorically operates as adaptation, power, and as a state-of-grace, it is important to ground our notion of what poetry-infused critical literacy looks like.

Literacy as Adaptation

Scribner (1984) began her interpretation of literacy by introducing the notion of "functional literacy," which is "conceived broadly as the level of proficiency necessary for effective performance in a range of settings and customary activities" (p. 9). Hayes (1996) situated literacy more in terms of being a social process by defining "being literate" as a person's ability to successfully adapt their communicative indications to meet the demand of a particular "task environment" (p. X). This means constructing a poem to perform at a slam in a rowdy bar may involve different tasks than writing a poem to publish in a school's literary journal. Heath (1978) provided the conceptual framework of a "literacy event" (p. X) to better examine the dynamics between spoken and written language in a given social context. According to Heath (1982), a literacy event refers to "any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes" (p. 92).

My practices as an educator were largely informed by the pedagogies that spawned from the poetry slam community, because they promote the practice of literacy skills essential in the digital age (Hull, 2003). While poetry slam began as a grassroots, anti-academic genre

(McDaniel, 2000), educational institutions have increasingly embraced slam because it engages struggling readers (Tatum, 2005), promotes multiliteracy instruction and orality (Ellis, Gere & Lamberton, 2003), encourages community building (Fisher, 2003), helps students address themes of social justice (Stovall, 2006) and civic agency (Ingalls, 2012), promotes critical cross-cultural conversations (Jocson, 2011), encourages literacy outside of the classroom (Biggs-El, 2012), and inspires students to use exploratory writing to reflect on their culture, families, and lived experiences (Rudd, 2012). Inevitably, many educators have come to embrace the practice because they see how much authentically it resonates with some teenagers. As Low (2011) claimed, "The culture can offer young people across the spectrum a space of identity-formation and performance, creativity, and political engagement" (p. viii).

In considering how spoken word pedagogy promotes an adaptive literacy paradigm, there are numerous possible actions to take during the construction of a poem in a classroom setting which may change depending on the situation. For example, the literacy event of "revision" can involve reading a text critically, marking and annotating a text, providing written and vocal feedback about a text, listening to how a line of text sounds spoken out loud, and ultimately rewriting unsuccessful concepts within a text and reworking the spatial relationships between words on a page. Furthermore, the literacy event may task students to employ different literacy skills if the revision takes place in-person in a peer-review circle or perhaps online using a peer evaluation tool. Spoken word pedagogy complicates the standard notion of literacy because prowess involves developing skills beyond functional reading and writing.

The adaptive nature of poetry may also provide some insight as to why some people find the practice elusive. Poetry critic Stephen Burt (2013) explained that poetry is difficult for some to define or conceptualize because literacy acts involving poetry constitute many different practices:

> Poetry isn't one thing that serves one purpose, any more than music or computer programming serve one purpose. The Greek word [for] poem just means "a made thing," and poetry is just a set of techniques—ways of making patterns—that put emotions into words. And the more techniques you know, the more things you can make. And the more patterns you can recognize in things you might already like or love. (p. 1)

The abstract nature of poetry makes it a quality vehicle to promote literacy as adaptation, but its abstractness makes it equally hard to use language to pin down its characteristics. Even Webster's Dictionary is coy about defining a singular function of poetry, as seen in their *Word History* blog entitled "A Poet by any Other Name" (2019).

> You cannot carry anything in a poem. You cannot use it to store books or shoes or paper clips. You cannot use a poem as a cutting board or as a mode of transportation. A poem will not protect you from a draft. A poem will not take dictation, nor will it protect your eyes in bright sun. A poem cannot keep you warm and you cannot use it to trim your hair. A poem is hardly a thing at all.
>
> Except, of course, that it is, as the millennia of poetry prove. And etymologically, a poet is a maker.

A popular moniker that poets adopt in poetry slam community, present company included, is wordsmith (Camangian, 2008). The title of wordsmith is used interchangeably as a role, job title, and identity. The metaphor of a wordsmith evokes an idea that poets hammer words the same way blacksmiths hammer tools and weapons of varying functionality.

Literacy as Power

Scribner's second metaphor for how literacy operates is *literacy as power*. Commenting on Freire's notion of literacy as a tool for social transformation, she claimed, "Effective literacy education, in his view, creates a critical consciousness through which a community can analyze its conditions of social existence and engage in effective action for a just society" (Scribner, 1984). The *literacy as power* metaphor moralizes what it means to be literate by instilling a sense of ethos related to the notion of critical citizenship. As the quote demonstrates, being a critically literate citizen involves two criteria: developing the ability to "analyze" one's "conditions of

social existence" and "engage in effective action" to improve one's own standpoint and the world.

Being critically literate means having the aptitude needed to effectively assess networks of power to see how one's standpoint is related to others in a hierarchic society. McLaren and Giroux (1997) state that a major limitation of critical discussion among educators is that discourse is often phrased in a way that limits the possible agency of participants to being confined within "the logic of capital." Advancing the language of critique is a crucial step toward overcoming gaps in achieving justice, because "pedagogically, language provides the self-definitions upon which people act, negotiate various subject positions, and undertake a process of naming and renaming the relations between themselves, others, and the world" (p. 16). Duncan-Andrade and Morell (2008) claimed that it is the responsibility of critical educators to promote the examination of texts that are closely related to the cultures and backgrounds of students, because alternative frameworks like hip hop pedagogy task students with making sense of how they relate to people and places in their own homes and communities. Weiss and Herndon (2001) claimed hip hop can be a "dominant form of expression" when young people are first learning the skills necessary to better vocalize their condition through writing processes. This is why a growing number of educators have begun to adopt hip hop pedagogies into their classroom, because spoken word encourages students to use a language they know to comment on forces in their life they deem to be unjust (Ellis, Gere, & Lamberton, 2003). As Ingalls (2012) claimed, spoken word pedagogy instills in youth a sense of purpose that "involves a resistance to societal limitations on language, emotion, age, and education" (p. 107).

While it is important for students to recognize how power affects their status as critical citizens, it is even more important that young people develop the literacy skills required to "engage in effective action" against unjust forces (Scribner, 1984). Essentially, action in such

terms means a critically literate individual is equipped to both *traverse* and *transcend* injustices. Developing writing, reading, and communication skills in an education setting that treats societal injustices as problems to solve encourages students to consider how said skills can help them change spaces around them for the better. For example, an early hip hop pedagogy publication demonstrates how a high school English classroom used poetry writing as a method for "dislodging violence" in the local community by encouraging students to write about their anger instead of acting upon it (Bruce & Davis, 2000). A major finding in the study is that reading, writing, and reciting culturally relevant poetry helps students traverse obstacles both in and out of the classroom because slam "builds on students' intrigue" and "bridges between students' home literacies and the literacies of high culture" (Bruce & Davis, 2000, p. 122).

Poetry is also an ideal vehicle to promote literacy as power because the practice encourages students to develop a dialogic voice. In a case study of a six-year-old poet and her in-school interactions with her peers, Dyson (2005) claimed students "infused and surrounded all literacy activities with an abundance of talk" (p. 150). As an example, Dyson depicted a scenario where the study's participant, Tionna, uses phrases she hears in a classroom conversation to construct a written poem. Similar "text/talk" discourse loops even occur during performances outside of classroom settings such as slams and open mics, where audiences often responds dialogically to the presented poem by laughing, shouting, or snapping their fingers (Fiore, 2015). In short, being literate in a spoken word pedagogy classroom means more than understanding the narrative elements of a poem. Literacy means you have something to say about the poem too.

Literacy-as-a-State-of-Grace

While the bridges built by spoken word pedagogy can help students *traverse* adversity, critically literate students have also learned how to use the spoken word to work toward

transcending that which oppresses them. This liberatory viewpoint of literacy education harkens back to Scribner's (1984) third metaphor of literacy-as-a-state-of-grace:

> The power and functionality of literacy is not bound by political or economic parameters but in a sense transcends them; the literate individual's life derives its meaning and significance from intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual participation in the accumulated creations and knowledge of human kind, made available through the written word." (p. 14).

Essentially, spoken word pedagogy promotes this sense of transcendence because writers are given the opportunity to use poetry to craft an idealized world. Anzuldua's (1987) critical work echoed this sentiment, claiming "I write the myths in me, the myths I am, the myths I want to become" (p. 93). Jocson (2011) found that dialoguing with young people about writing serves as a "necessary reflection to ease the pain of experiences with courage and clarity" (p. 159). Spoken word provides writers the opportunity to work through indignation by considering things that are fantastical, celebratory, funny, and loving. As Audre Lorde (1984) claims, "This is poetry as illumination, for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are—until the poem—nameless and formless, about to be birthed but already felt" (p. 36).

Spoken word pedagogy is also inherently a critical literacy pedagogy because the practice encourages youth to foster intergenerational dialogue with elder peers and mentors (Fisher, 2009). Several studies demonstrated that students often feel an engagement with the advocacy of teaching artists, because they function more as peers and less as gatekeepers in the classroom (Aptowicz, 2009; Ellis, Gere & Lamberton, 2003; Somers-Willett, 2009). Following a 'preach before you practice methodology,' spoken word and hip-hop pedagogies often task students to recognize injustice and social crisis around them in order to address inadequacies in power structures through writing and performance (Biggs-El, 2012; Bruce & Davis, 2000; Ingalls, 2012; Jocson, 2011; Stovall, 2006). The impact of these pedagogies often result in a network of advocates in the youth slam community who feel an urgency towards social engagement: "The

continued enthusiasm of its practitioners is owed to their own perseverance to reclaim and assert their voices in public spaces, and to their belief that the practice helps them to be the agents of change" (Ingalls, 2012). Rose (1994) explained that authors from marginalized arts communities, such as hip-hop culture, often craft narratives that vie for a relinquishing of oppression, a rise in status, recognition, inclusion, access, and acclaim. By showing students how to vocalize social crises, teaching artists provide a first step toward civic engagement. In Stovall's study (2006), poet and educator Avery R. Young articulated this notion in his message to his students, "Now that you've written a good poem, be good people" (p. 73).

In an ethnographic study of four poetry teaching artists, Stovall (2006) found that hip hop and spoken word are powerful catalysts for "developing lines of communication" between students and teachers. The lines of dialogue that culture sharing open can help communities talk out what steps to take—between learning to talk critically and learning to walk critically. Winn (Fisher, 2005) provided critical educators with the notion of *literocracy*, which is "an intersection of literacy and democracy" that "blurs boundaries of oral/aural and written while emphasizing that language processes exist in partnership with action in order to guide young people to develop a passion for words and language" (p. 92). A common expression teaching artists share with their students in youth poetry slam programs is to "speak your truth," which suggests that idealized spoken word pedagogies challenge students to bring their own interests and ideologies into the classroom as a way to build community. In her ethnographic account of an after-school poetry writing program for high schoolers, Winn (Fisher, 2007) documented that students and their mentors use poetry to craft a dialogic relationship, even noting that it is not uncommon for students to write while others are speaking or vocally challenge mentors when sharing their own version of the truth. By fostering an environment where youth and adults share and construct knowledge together, groups of writers create what Winn (2003) referred to as "participatory

literacy communities." These literacy spaces work to bridge the learning that takes place in school and the knowledge acquisition that occurs in the home in an ideal way since hierarchies between students and teachers are minimized through acts of sharing and dialogue. As Winn (2007) explained, "In conceptualizing "literocracy," literacy is an act of reciprocity; you pass on what you know, and all participants have an opportunity to cultivate their mind with the skills they bring" (p. 5). The dialogic reflection between reflection and growth occurs because those who struggle to make sense of art also struggle to make sense of the world. As Winterson (1995) claimed, "I have to work for art if I want art to work for me" (p. 6).

The exchanges of dialogue that spoken word pedagogy inspire are not just interpersonal conversations. Poets also use texts to foster intrapersonal discussions with the self. For this reason, a number of researchers have advocated for the use of performance art as a way to promote Freire's (1970) concept of critical "praxis". Arts education has an ideal place in critical literacy classrooms that promote "problem-posing" frameworks, because as Winterson (1995) claimed, "The true artist is after the problem. The false artist wants it solved (by somebody else)" (p. 12). Poetry has a unique ability to force writers to confront their own actions and beliefs, because as Audre Lorde (1984) said, "Our poems formulate the implications of ourselves, what we feel within and dare make real" (p. 39). Yeats (1918) famously wrote about this phenomenon, arguing that it was the job of the rhetorician to confront exterior forces that are deemed political, while it is the job with the artist to "quarrel" with the self . While Hanisch's (1970) critique of the "personal is political" has challenged Yeats' notion that poetry writing cannot be inherently political, what is undeniably true is the notion that critical art can help young people better themselves in a political world through the process of introspection. As Winterson (1995) claimed, "Every day, in countless ways, you and I convince ourselves about ourselves. True art, when it happens to us, challenges the 'I' that we are" (p. 15).

Poetry Deserves the Love of Literacy Researchers

According to Heinz (1999), a unique characteristic of poets from the poetry slam community is that they "infiltrated both the underground literary scene and mass media, producing effects in cinema, television, and the press" (p. 236). While slam was initially conceived as a parlor game for the bohemian bar crowd who think academic readings are a snore (Kaufman & Griffin, 1999), the popularity of slam happened to coincide with the same amplifications of new textual interfaces that begged for the development of New Literacy Studies (Street, 1993). In slam's inception, you had to travel to a show to hear a poem, but the advent of the Internet has allowed artists to record their poems in the form of spoken word albums, choreographed videos, through hypertext, and even through static visual mediums such as memes and digital comics. This is one key reason that a growing number of educators use spoken word as a mainstay in their multiliteracy pedagogies, because of poetry's ability to prevail across diverse mediums.

A number of scholars cite a 1996 article in the *Harvard Educational Review* entitled "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures" as an initial conceptual publication for the field of New Literacy Studies (Cazden et al, 1996). An international collective of literacy researchers, calling themselves The New London Group, claimed that globalization and an increased attention to linguistic and cultural diversity had caused them to reconsider the parameters for what constitutes a literacy process. Essentially, they argued that text-based literacies dominated the era of Fordism and assembly-line economies, whereas new modes of communication heralded by technologies such as the internet now task young people with processing information textually, audibly, visually, kinesthetically, spatially, and hypertexually. This notion of "multiliteracies" opens up the boundaries of what is considered a "text," meaning that being able to "read" artifacts such as songs and audible recordings, visuals such as

photographs and films, and even digital literacies like chat speak and texting shorthand all constitute literacy practices.

The same year as the New London publication, a documentary crew attended the 1996 National Poetry Slam to follow poets such as Saul Williams, Jessica Care Moore, Mums da Schemer, Beau Sia, Patricia Smith, Bob Holman, and Taylor Mali competing in a newfound literary "sport" known as "slam." The release of Paul Devlin's film *SlamNation* in 1998 heralded a seemingly urgent period of time when artists who were rumbling in the underground only years before had suddenly achieved international notoriety through a variety of multimedia distribution channels (Aptowicz, 2008). This explains why a common tactic of English educators to share poems with their class is to play a poem from an online video or audible streaming site, because the era of the spoken word revolution (Eleveld & Smith, 2003) coincides with the call for the development of New Literacy Practices. This is why when someone asks me what the value of poetry is, I tell them the value of its mastery is having the ability to make whatever I want.

Flying Kites

In the prison workshop I typically write a prompt on the board, and then the class will spend two or three minutes picking apart the prompt to make sure they understand the "rules." As a result, I purposefully started phrasing my writing prompts with ambiguous instructions.

One night I shared a prompt that could be interpreted many ways, and I saw a bunch of alarm bells go off in my students' heads. Hands go up.

Since we were having some transparent conversations, I decided to ask the class if they noticed that they always obsess over the parameters of prompts that were clearly designed to be vague. My students said it's because when Corrections Officers give them instructions, they want to know every aspect of every single thing so they don't get in trouble.

"That's incarceration," I said.

They agreed. Then I asked them to think about why I might want to push back against that behavior in our space.

“So you're messing with us?” one of my students asked.

“No, I'm trying to shake this place out of you, if only for a few minutes.”

They smiled and started writing.

Suddenly, the poem became a problem to solve with multiple ways to approach it. Then the class shared unique poems, all incorporating strategies different than the next.

Part II: The Feature

One of the many legendary quirks of the Green Mill cocktail lounge is the "Al Capone table." Before the Uptown pub served as a proverbial birthplace of poetry slam, the historic jazz lounge was a prohibition-era speakeasy owned by notorious Chicago mobster Al Capone (Elder, 2007). *Allegedly Capone chose the table as his standard seat because it is the only booth that directly faces the door* (Bernot, 2013). *Though his back would be toward the stage, the gangster could enjoy an illegal drink and still have the jump on anyone who walked into the bar.*

On Sunday nights, it is custom to offer the Al Capone table to "the feature" of that week's poetry slam. At slams, open mics, and other types of poetry readings, the feature is often the "main event" of the show. This is often an artist of note, who has developed a body of work enough to travel to venues outside their local arts community. There is a strategy in occupying the Al Capone table, because it is an opportunity for entrepreneurial artists to display their merchandise: books, albums, broadsides, T-shirts, bumper stickers, and other types of swag. This way the feature can get a jump on anyone who walks into the bar.

The feature of a slam can be compared to Al Capone in two ways: first, the feature slot is often reserved for artists who've turned their hobby into a business. It is good etiquette for venue hosts to pay their feature, offer non-monetary perks like a meal or gift card, or at least "pass the hat" to collect gas money for travelling artists. Many poets who have been booked to feature use the opportunity to showcase their boldest and best-crafted work. Second, like Al Capone, the feature slot is often reserved for "original ganstas," (or O.G.s). An O.G. is someone who has put in their time on the open mic and slam scene, whose work has broken ground enough to deserve a spotlight. The length of a feature set varies from venue to venue, but often an O.G. is asked to share 3 to 5 pieces that serve as representative to their greater body of work.

Part II of this dissertation functions as the feature, because this section features five chapters that serve as a showcase of my greater body of work. This is the part of the dissertation where I "get down to business," and speak with my most direct voice. Though Part III showcases more chapters that are shorter and abstract, Part II is where I speak unambiguously about the scope and stakes of this dissertation. It is also an opportunity for me to step out from behind the curtain, and speak most explicitly about my best practices as an educator and trajectory as a performance artist. Like any feature set, I get to babble a bit about my life. After reading Parts I and II, the reader will have been introduced to all the narrative threads of this dissertation, and should have the necessary familiarity and knowledge base to read the rest of this study.

The first chapter of Part II is called "Power Struggles," and showcases the student/mentor relationship between myself and the first participant of this study, a former teen alum from Slam Camp. While my uncertainty as a researcher is voiced as a search for a thesis statement, the conversations in the chapter highlight a critical need to rethink the ethical considerations of poetic inquiry. The next chapter, "Writing Without Shackles," is a chapter grown out of collaboration with a group of educators in Yorkshire, England. In many ways, British English curricula is more prescriptive than curricula in the United States, so I use the opportunity to position spoken word pedagogy as 1) an identity-centered pedagogy that 2) is constructed of multimodal text sets. In this chapter I share my best practices as a teaching artist, and use a visit to an American classroom to demonstrate how I use poetry for Action Research. In the next chapter, "No Hassle," I introduce the theme of "precarity," which speaks to a

number of issues that threaten the sustainability of poetry-centered literacy communities. I introduce the site Last Chance High, to share the lessons I learned about "deficit thinking" (Valencia, 1997) and "Culturally Relevant Pedagogy" (Ladson-Billings, 1994) in underresourced learning spaces. Then, in the chapter "New Spiel, Old Spiel," I cover the trajectory of the poetry slam movement, to explore how spoken word evolved from an underground artform into a global "youth literacy" (Moje, 2004). I also introduce the site of Slam Camp, to show how poetry works as a critical self-reflexive tool for anti-racist educators. Finally, I "remix" the sites of "FrankenSlam" and "the prison" to explore how a funded humanities program can transform an underresourced learning space. This chapter features some of the "structural" and "attitudinal" barriers that must be overcome to sustain a literacy space, which will be a recurring examination in the rest of this dissertation. Though the subject matter is varied, all of the chapters in The Feature section are about arrival, in a way.

Power Struggles

In which the poet: synthesizes texts including a letter, a poem, and chat dialogue to create a co-constructed narrative on ethical considerations in poetic research and the power distance between students and mentors in spoken word communities.

I banged the back of my knuckles against the door, clenching my jaw and trying not to care I was knocking like a cop. It was after lights out but I heard shouting on the other side of the wall. The dorm room door slowly opened. Frisk's eyes were wet and red and fixed to the floor.

I lowered my voice: "Frisk, your mom texted me and said you hung up on her."

Frisk's face twisted like sand shifting in the top of an hourglass. His face said he was fighting blurting out a flurry of words.

"I could hear yelling in here from way down the hallway. Your voice sounds upset and I need you to tell me what's going on."

Frisk opened the door wider to step out of the frame, and I could see his roommate in the corner with his blanket pulled up to his chin. Frisk's pacing and shouting into the phone had left the young man huddled and clutching the wall.

"Let's step outside in the hallway so we can talk, and maybe your roommate can get some sleep."

Frisk and I sat on the edge of a stained dormitory couch, and I tried to rub the tired out of my eyes. It was almost midnight, on a June summer night in 2015. We were now halfway through Slam Camp, our week-long summer academy for teens who write and perform poetry. Frisk was a star pupil last year, and while he struggles sometimes with social interactions, he seemed to find a community of supportive friends at our camp in 2014. This year was different: he was irritable, volatile, and would snap at people or withdraw into himself at a moment's notice.

While on the phone with Frisk's mother, she reminded me of some of the turmoil that has been happening over the past year. Frisk, who typically excelled in our academic setting, was failing most of his classes at school. He was growing increasingly aggressive and violent with friends. After Frisk battered his mom during an argument, he was incarcerated in an assessment center for teens with behavioral disorders. His mother told me that his (one of many) doctors had just diagnosed him with something called PANS. I had never heard of PANS, so in an effort to learn more, I turned to Stanford's website from the Department of Pediatrics:

> Pediatric Acute-onset Neuropsychiatric Syndrome (PANS) is a clinical diagnosis given to children who have a dramatic – sometimes overnight – onset of neuropsychiatric symptoms including obsessions/compulsions or food restriction. They are often diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) or an eating disorder, but the sudden onset of symptoms separates PANS from these other disorders. In addition, they may have symptoms of depression, irritability, anxiety, and have difficulty with schoolwork. The cause of PANS is unknown in most cases but is thought to be triggered by infections, metabolic disturbances, and other inflammatory reactions ("PANS," 2017).

One of the realities confounding the issue of Frisk's health is that many people blamed his suddenly erratic behavior on his autism diagnosis. An article in Psychology Today suggested that autistic teens are up to 40% more likely to be incarcerated than youth without a diagnosis, despite the lack of evidence of a strong correlation between autism and violence (Rettew, 2017). Referring to a comprehensive study of 300,000 youth in Stockholm Sweden, the article also suggested that many of the violent behaviors exhibited by autistic teens are more likely associated with psychological disorders such as ADHD or Conduct Disorder. In our case, an autistic teen became sick, and the public correlated the behavior of the sickness to the behaviors of autism. Some of said public happen to be summer camp counselors and youth poets.

I shared some words with Frisk and sent him back to his room, not quite sure if he fully heard what I had to say. He was a teenager after all. But then again, I am not sure if my words were helpful in any way. I was an adult after all. And judging from Frisk's statements of feeling persecuted and misunderstood all week, it's safe to say his faith in adults wasn't particularly high

as of late. Just three more nights in the dorm to go. I hoped that the students and skeletal crew of counselors could just make it through to Saturday, and maybe everything would be okay. I didn't know what to do. I never knew what to say. I don't even know what this chapter is about. Maybe I will figure it out before the end. All that I know is that Frisk belongs in it.

Open Letter to Frisk # 1

Dear Student,

In the lecture hall we have spoken about the act of confession. In the two years we have known each other, we have shared many "confessional" poems where the author "removes the mask" (Rosenthal, 1959). Yet, in our relationship as student and mentor, the "power distance" between us makes it difficult to have unmasked conversation (Grisham, 2006). You were my first participant, just a teenager when you signed up for this study. I kept in contact with your mom and shared my data with a professor, to make sure we were on the level. You seemed excited to be a part of science, to shape the sphere of known knowledge in the universe.

Now that you are older, I must confess that I asked you to take part in a study because I did not know what else to do. You sent me message after message, sharing stories of rage and chaos. You were mad at your doctors; mad at your teachers; mad at your parents; mad at your friends; mad at yourself; and it seemed like you needed an adult to listen. Don't get it wrong: you have a brilliant mind. You are a wondrous communicator with unique insight about education, and poetry, and incarceration, and the world in general. I knew I wanted to collaborate with you and learn from your worldview. But when I asked you to take part in a study, it wasn't because I had some set objective. To be honest, I was exhausted. I was overwhelmed and did not know how to answer all your calls for help. I thought maybe a study could bring some structure to our conversations. I didn't know what research questions to come up with, so I asked you what you

wanted to talk about. I said the topic was up to you. I don't know if you had a set agenda either, besides being heard. Late one night you sent me a message, in a seemingly excited state:

> Hey, I had another idea about how we can explore the inner depths of my emotionality in our writing project. An underlying cause of a lot of my anger persisting is because of how I never developed consistently good anger management habits. Can you relate to that? Have you ever resorted to violence in attempt to solve your problems?

What can I say to my students who know some things about poetry and violence? What more can I offer besides my time, a little eye contact, and list of questions? Instead of setting an agenda for our interviews, I learned to just lean in and listen to you. Sometimes we talked about poetry. Sometimes we talked about the academy and what Socrates might say about the state of the world in 2015. Sometimes we talked about video games, and how you wanted to make them when you grew older. But mostly I listened as you told me that everyone in your life "wants to put you in a box." You picked a pseudonym "Frisk," and I kept copious notes that never seemed to make sense the next morning. I told you I would put you in my dissertation somewhere. Some chapter about pop culture, or colonization in the academy, or something smart like that. But I don't know what specifically. My research committee will read this chapter, and want to know what the whole point of it was. I'll say to them that I am not sure, but I know it has something to do with violence and problem solving.

Sincerely,

Your Teacher

A Need to Convey

Though Slam Camp is only a week long, many students use social media to stay in touch with the counselors. Some students say hi every couple of years, while others "like" and "comment" on our Tweets and status updates every afternoon. Ask any poet and they will tell you that spoken word events create intense, immediate relationships (Reyes, 2006), and many counselors from the academy use social media to extend the impact of their mentorship. Students

we haven't heard from in a while sometimes send us messages, to ask for advice about college or provide some updates of their life as young professionals. Sometimes students ask for a letter of recommendation, or just want to randomly say thank you—for a gesture or experience from years ago that stuck with them.

Obviously there are always ethical concerns when teachers use social media as a teaching tool (Rodriguez, 2011), especially when students and teachers use it to bridge formal and informal learning (Chen & Bryer, 2012). To navigate the oft-evolving digital landscape, we had to make some rules for ourselves. As they grew older, some students became more explicit on social media about things like illicit drug use and sexual activity. After sharing concerns with one another, the counselors decided to remove ourselves from private social media groups where students were most candid about their experiences transitioning from high school to college. At the same time, we invited students to keep in touch with us on our public pages. We kept in contact with moderators of "camp alumni" pages and tried to model digital citizenship to our students (Wineburg & Reisman, 2015).

One night a student who moderated a page sent me a direct message. She said Frisk's posts had become more frequent and aggressive. Members of the group complained that Frisk had sent them threatening messages, and asked moderators to intervene. Allegedly he sent some of his friends in the group a message. It was long and hard to follow. A recurring topic in my conversations with Frisk was his rate of speech, and a resentment he felt about neurotypical folks expecting him to conform to their standard—instead of learning to keep up. All the same, I studied the letter in search of answers. Clues for why my star student was starting to act so harshly. To isolate some of the words, I added line breaks to the first paragraph of the letter, to create a found poem. I call it "Power Struggles."

In case I end
up letting the

better of my
judgments slip
and therefore
offend and
destroy again,
I need you
to convey what
I want to say
to them.

I cannot let
my angers
slip, because
they are so
embedded
in my line of
thinking, and
the same goes
for them.

So we can't
in any way
handle a blame
game anymore
because of how
we are just
too immature
to face the facts
and end up
throwing fits,
our pain
and trauma
notwithstanding.

Sometimes
I wonder if
these people
don't want to
let go of their
trauma, because
it's their comfort
zone. And the
same applies for
me. Then again,
that's what trauma
does to people.

What I envision

the problem then is,
is that we are both
working ourselves
into a rage, and
that is causing
us to ultimately
fail in our intentions
because neither of
us will listen to
each other.

All we ever do
is get into power
struggles ultimately
ending in us both
being ostracized by
each other.

I read Frisk's message over and over, scanning for words that seemed to stick out: "trauma," "destruction," "anger," "rage," "failure," "ostracization," "pain," "power struggle." I did not know how to speak to this. The moderator of the group asked me to intervene, but I encouraged her to make the decision, along with other leaders of their student group. Though members of the group expressed their love for Frisk to me, my students decided to temporarily block him from the group. They argued that they needed to prioritize the safety of everyone on the page, and I felt they were thoughtful in their decision. Frisk, understandably, was distraught. I was unprepared for the volume of messages that would flood my inbox in the coming weeks.

Open Letter to Frisk # 2

Dear Student,

I need to communicate to you that I don't know all the answers. Most of the time I've known you, I can't say I knew what I was doing. I was a young poet. A new teacher. A fledgling camp director and fumbling researcher. What I am trying to say to you is you were my teacher too. At camp, the counselors used to call our gatherings "powwows." You challenged us to be more mindful and educated us about the appropriation of Native American culture and

spirituality (Owen, 2008). We listened. Sometimes it was hard, but yes, we listened. You made us reshape our best practices. We stopped calling things we like our "spirit animals." We said that pancakes were our spirit animals, and you made us see how cheap that is.

In graduate school I took a course on discourse analysis. A course requirement was to conduct a research project, and it made sense to focus on our communication with one another. We are poets and analyzers of words. My initial goals were to help you see why your friends found your conversational patterns abrasive. By analyzing your discussions on social media, I wanted to examine the tinges of sabotage in your speech. I thought using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) would be an ideal lens to look through to focus on issues like conversational turns, topical shifts, and repetitive themes in dialogue. My original aim was to help you discover how you can talk your way out of this mess. I was worried about adopting normative behaviors that dismissed your identity and chosen way to speak. You taught me that the common understanding of autism is situated by the way we as a society speak about autism, as well as the ways adults—such as researchers, parents, educators, and medical professionals—frame our concepts of how autism and dialogue are interrelated. I was an adult: a third-year graduate student, and had just learned the adage "nothing about us without us" (Charlton, 2000) I didn't want to speak for you. I wanted to speak with you.

I have to confess to you that I was worried about the ethics of all this. When I approached our campus Human Subjects Office about our study, I was surprised to find that single-participant case studies are not considered human subject research by my university, and did not require a formal IRB. A conversation with one person, they said, does not constitute systematic research. Still, I first pitched the idea of the study to you on the telephone, and informed you about the logistics and your rights as a participant. I spoke to your mother regarding the

dynamics and risks involved with the study. I sent a follow-up email reestablishing the imperative points we discussed on the phone.

I invited you to pick a pseudonym, and I suggested "Wander," from the video game *Shadow of the Colossus*. I thought the moniker captured your spirit of inquiry and curiosity. You liked the idea of being a video game protagonist, and asked instead if you could be "Frisk" from *Undertale*. I was a little sad I couldn't gift you a nickname, but I was glad you trusted in me to ask for what you wanted. Both games contend with uncertain journeys, and the violence that comes along with them. In both games the heroes slay great foes, then later question the agency of their actions. Both games beg the player to consider violence as a method of problem solving.

Sincerely,

Your Teacher

Rage vs. Indignation

Outbursts on social media seemed to increase as 2015 came to a close. Frisk sent more messages to my inbox than I could ever read, and he admitted that he did not always expect a reply. He took less conversational turns, capitalizing on the chance to get as many words in as he could. Then one day my phone received a burst of notifications, with concerns about the spiraling of his mental state. An argument between Frisk and his mother had turned physical, and his family was worried he might need to be sent back to an incarcerated setting. His mother called me on the telephone, frantic and afraid for her son and herself. She told me she was worried that some of the outside stimuli in his life was ramping him up, and asked if I wouldn't mind cutting contact for a while. While speaking with her on the phone, Frisk pelted my inbox with messages for help. I cut-and-pasted a segment of the uncoded transcript of the messages to create a found poem called "Please. Respond soon. I beg of you."

I have not vituperated you in any sense. This is not rage; it's indignation.
I have only criticized your methods. I'm the only one experiencing this mistreatment.

So of course there is a disconnect between the reality and your interpretation of it.
I'm sorry it's come to this. But everybody who believes me doesn't have the power to take the fight straight to my parents and have the authority to make solidly evidenced claims gets fired from caring for me, and those who don't believe me make things worse.
My Mom's about to call you. Please, focus on addressing my complaints first before condemning my actions.
Please. Respond soon. I beg of you. My life is officially ruined.
I BEG OF YOU. THIS CAN'T HAPPEN TO ME. I DON'T BELONG THERE, PLACED ALONG TRUE DELINQUENTS AND SICK PEOPLE.
I feel betrayed.
Fine. I'll do as you ask.

I told Frisk that we couldn't speak if his mother would not consent to our discussion. I said that I could not stand by him if he was going to batter women in his home. He said a number of things, but none of them sounded like the brilliant young man I met at summer camp. In just sixteen months, Frisk had lost a support system of dozens of peers and mentors he had formed at our academy. For a number of weeks, I didn't hear from him. Frisk had to set out on his own, and slay some colossi.

Open Letter to Frisk # 3

I need to speak to you now about time as a resource, and how I never had enough to give. An increasing number of poets like me have gone to graduate school to become researchers for our community (McDaniel, 2000). Then we lock ourselves away from that community for a decade. Sometimes I search for truth in books, alone in my room. I encourage you to read the poem "Time Problem" by Brenda Hillman (1997). The poem is about the dilemma working mothers face, who must sacrifice quality time with loved ones for their study. When Hillman's daughter asked for attention, Hillman explained the time problem to her, saying "I would die for you but I don't have ten minutes" (1997).

Your situation slowly improved in the spring of 2016. With the blessings of your mother we started chatting once again. Your friends allowed you back in the social media groups, and you started to mend the ripped stitches in the fabrics of your life. I started to divvy out more and

more of my time again, a resource that had been recently returned to you. I believe our relationship benefited from the break, but we still never found a solution for my time problem—"of there not being / enough of it" (Hillman, 1997). I have to confess to you that sometimes I did not have the strength to respond to your greetings. Sometimes I stared at my phone weighing like a stone in my hand. Sometimes you asked if I was there, and I could not bring myself to say yes. I would die for you Frisk, but I apologize for the days I do not have ten minutes to spare.

The truth is that a whole lot of my students want to kill themselves. Some of my students have scratched at their skin with their nails and posted Instagram videos of slurred words and irritated eyes. Some students have panic attacks, and contend with bulimia or schizophrenia. Some students have been kicked out of their homes and have to go searching for food on the daily. All this is to say that sometimes I don't always have ten minutes for them either. Some days my body betrays me. Some days I have to close my laptop screen to hide away from vicarious trauma (Newell & MacNeil, 2010). Some days I need to be still. To be wounded and silent.

When your mother asked if we might consider letting you come back to camp, I gave an answer that seemed to break her spirit. I can't remember the last time I disappointed a parent that much. I want you to know I advocated for you Frisk, but we decided as a team that we didn't have the capacity to meet your needs. In 2016, sixty students competed for 10 minutes of our time—students with stories about sexual assault and gender dysphoria. Stories of drug addiction and stays in psychiatric hospitals. That year a counselor slept on the floor of a camper's dorm room, because it was the closest thing we could offer to suicide watch. The psychology department on campus said they'd love to help, but they were unequipped to help minors under 18. We were worried about a student slipping between our fingers, and we were worried you would wrestle away from our grasp.

Though your mom sounded upset, you said you understood the reasoning for our decision. You said you had some sins to atone for. I said it wasn't like that.

Sincerely,

Your Teacher

"It's Been a Blur Since the Time Machine"

The year that Frisk missed summer camp, he sent me his first chapbook collection, filled with poems about school, and family, and incarceration. I saw themes that carried over from our discussion: violence, isolation, rage, and remorse. A lot of the poems spoke of a need for atonement. In my first readings of the book, I scanned the poems looking for themes relevant to our study. But as I combed through images, many of which personified conflict and chaos, I asked myself whether it was fair to frame a study participant by their catharsis. The stories of being shut down and locked away made for good data. He called his past fettered mental state a "time machine," and I thought that was an interesting metaphor to explore. But these images didn't capture the themes that had recently entered our conversations: "patience," "accountability," "grace," and "forgiveness." "Healing" and "hope."

One poem in the book captured some of these themes, titled "For a Future Journal Entry" The narrative of the poem depicted a return to normalcy—of finding more certainty in mental stability, and the beginnings of making amends with the stakeholders in Frisk's life. I felt a need to share this poem: a story of the slow journey to recovery. The untangling of violence and problem solving skills. I did not wish to analyze or scrutinize these words. I just wanted to give space to a story that needs to be heard. I have omitted the names of Frisk's schoolyard friends. The poem is a hopeful message to himself, a list of subtle revelations about growth.

> You've awoken five hours away from Mom picking you up.
> It's been a "good day," it seems.
> Forgetting autumn and the paltry heat sticking to your shirt
> That you're afraid to take off for showers,

You tune into the class this period.
The U.S. history teacher is discussing the Civil War.

You know the concepts he's teaching but are behind in your work.
The idea of laboring away to advance in a class
That you barely care for is such an asinine distraction.
But you learned to be industrious again.. Good.
Forget that it's been a blur since the time machine

Dropped you into this static epoch.
It's nostalgic, remember, to live close to friends
Splayed across lunch tables,
sitting at desks admiring crow nests on billboards
During idle time. It's always idle time,
Since you live so quietly like you're still overlooking
Spruce or pine trees on Lake Mirror in Wisconsin Dells,
Relaxing.

Ten seconds later, your mind flashes forward.
You, S— and P— blast finger guns
To fight off invisible enemies
On the front yard, imagining you're protagonists in *Red Dawn*, to surrounded by towering pine trees
Hanging low with the cold, outside and not insulated.

In the next five seconds,
In this boring battle of a shortened attention span—
Mr. Polish still going on mid-lecture—
You imagine that you could be in the Redwood Forest

Talking to your Dad about building crude supplies in the wilderness,
Thinking solely of pine trees or how grand it must be
To shade pitch-black every vast tableau
Of emotion that you've been painted into in your life .
You still think like you're bludgeoned with
Brightness when things must lull to raging darkness.
Yet day makes rage too tiring
When you sweat like a pig,
Keeps sunshine like moonshine seething in you.

Meanwhile, get through the class, move on.
You'll have more time to bide,
More chances to take in all the innocent classroom gossip
You love but hate.
Sort out the chants and intonations,
And carry them in your homework folder,
Because you live life as a student first.

The time: noon.
Your friends think it's not in any way obnoxious
To laugh when they're supposed to be working.
You're the quietest one in the room.

Ethical (Re)Considerations

Though I never made promises about the research project, it must have been disappointing for Frisk to hear so little about the outcome of our discussions. "Any updates on the study?" he'd sometimes ask. I would say I was not certain: that academic publishing takes time and I was trying to find my way. The data I collected for the period of a year spanned across different mediums, including audio-recorded phone conversations, video of performed poems, posts on social media, dialogue in online chat, observation from in-person conversations, essays responding to prompted questions, and text from Frisk's first poetry book. The full transcript of our year-long chat conversation spans 106 pages (including avatar photos and time stamps), and contains over 30,000 words. His book, *A Kapalika's backtracking: A memoir of past sins through poetry*, contains 19 poems, and spans across 55 book-sized pages. Once I talked to Frisk on the phone for two hours about the school-to-prison pipeline, only to find out later that the recorder did not pick up his side of the conversation. I could spend the rest of my life analyzing this same data set, regardless of the erased conversations and misplaced field notes.

I ended up taking an incomplete in the discourse analysis class, after my professional schedule blossomed like a mushroom cloud. A year later, I wrote a very flawed paper that was good enough for a grade. I presented our data at a discourse analysis conference, and mispronounced lots of words in front of smart people. I put the chapter in a drawer, knowing it lacked an apparent point to it. I scrapped the dataset and decided to start over. I decided my dissertation should focus on the relationships between mentors and students, and how our poetry speaks uniquely to our tensions and triumphs.

In 2017 I completed the protocols for a multi-site study and received approval from my university Institutional Review Board (IRB). In my first study with Frisk, I was told I did not need to file a Human Subjects form—that a conversation with one person does not constitute research, regardless if the participant is a teenager with a cognitive disability who was incarcerated during a portion of our time together. My conversations with Frisk made me reframe some ethical considerations for all my participants, which I will discuss in this section of the chapter. If I learned anything from Frisk—it is okay to deviate from a topic, as long as you make sure to cite your sources.

My conversations with Frisk helped me realize the limitations of using my conversations with the Office of Human Subjects as the focus of my ethical considerations. It is important to remember that IRB is an institutional checklist, and not a guiding paradigm or set of practices to ensure ethicality (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Guillemin, Gillam, Rosenthal, & Bolitho, 2012). Pointing to the shortcomings of solely relying on IRB to assess ethical concerns, Guiellemin and Gillam (2004) clarified that in addition to considering procedural ethics, researchers also need to consider and perfect their "ethics in practice," which "pertain to the day-to-day ethical issues that arise in the doing of research" (p. 264). Though I have identified some ethics in practice in my conversations with Frisk, different tensions revealed themselves in all my conversations with participants that I had to navigate. In their literature review, Guillemin and Gillam point to the "guiding ethical principles" established by the Australian NS as a helpful framework to consider whether participants are being treated respectfully. The three major principles addressed are respect for a participant's 1.) autonomy, 2.) privacy, and 3.) dignity. These three principles constituted the guiding paradigm in reconsidering my participant relationship with Frisk.

In our interviews together, I consistently shifted between leading and leaning in. This influenced the way I framed interviews with other participants too. I still came prepared to

interviews with a list of questions, but I learned to let go, allowing my questions to list toward what the participants wanted to talk about. My participants held valuable insight and an ability to solve critical issues, so often they were asked to assist me in crafting guiding questions, analyzing data, or thinking reflexively about key moments as co-researchers (Cammarota & Fine, 2010). Collaborative inquiry afforded participants additional freedom to make decisions and opportunities to buy into the research process. My aim in synthesizing my own stories with the experiences of participants was to emphasize our conversations as a collaborative dialogue.

In our first study, Frisk adopted the pseudonym "Frisk," but he had always wanted to retain his name. He is a performance poet after all: a public artist and intellectual who regularly stages critical argumentation. I was concerned about both his privacy as a participant, and his visibility as an autistic teen poet and young academic. My conversations with Frisk urged me to consider the topic of privacy for my future research. In regards to this dissertation, all participants under 18 were given a pseudonym, and all participants over 18 were given the option of using a pseudonym. However, some adult participants were given the option to identify themselves because their notoriety as a poet or educator lent increased credibility to their testimony. Now no longer a teenager, I gave Frisk the option to regain his name. On one hand, I wanted to err on the side of protecting his identity. On the other hand, I wanted his narrative to be given the same weight as the other influential artists in this dissertation. After a discussion with his mother, Frisk decided it would be safer to retain a pseudonym for this study. Although Frisk is candid about a lot of his life experiences when he is on stage, I supported his decision to remain anonymous in my dissertation.

I also removed identifiable details in Frisk's life, such as the names of his family and friends. I did not cite the name of his school or the region of the country that he lived in. I tried not to rely on recognizable descriptions of his appearance, and instead focused on the

meaningfulness of his actions and depth of his words. The identifiable details of all sites in this dissertation were buffed, except in cases where the site is a notable festival or event that could provide context to the culture and practices of the spoken word community. To ensure my participants felt that their stories were represented in a fair and respectful light, I shared transcription data and made drafts of chapters available to participants. I wanted to ensure they felt their dignity was upheld. This process gave participants more autonomy over how they were represented in my writing, and provided them the opportunity to assess whether they believed their character or identity was compromised. I sent this chapter to Frisk, and shared other chapters with participants as well.

One topic that warrants further discussion is the specific ethical considerations that relate to poetic inquiry. In my conversations with the Office of Human Subjects, I also inquired about the necessity of seeking IRB approval for autoethnographic poems. I was shocked when they said that poetic narratives also don't require IRB approval. A poem, they said, does not constitute systematic research. According to Faulkner (2009), some "poet researchers" have cited ethical concerns unique to poetry, particularly in regards to the murky relationships between researchers and participants. In their creative article, "IRB as Poetry," Lahman, Teman, and Richard (2019) explore the tensions they've experienced with IRB—critiquing norms such as inattention to nuance, prescriptive views of "vulnerable identity," and a misunderstanding of autoethnography.

Since I was given lax guidance, I decided to make an important distinction for my process. If a piece of data was constructed specifically for this dissertation, whether in the form of spoken dialogue or poem or social media message, I formally invited the author to serve as a participant, informed them of their rights, and shared a document of informed consent (and assent in the case of minors). However, if data appeared as generalizable knowledge in a public forum, such as in a published text or on a public webpage, I did not treat its authors as

participants. I treated these data points with the same processes as the theory researchers refer to in literature reviews, regardless if I was citing a poem or a previous research study. Regardless, I attempted to make explicit the ethical tensions I felt as a creative researcher while conducting this dissertation, to inform future conversations about the ethical responsibilities of poetry inquiry.

Years after starting my conversations with Frisk, I got the chance to start over. Maybe I needed some atonement too. Before defending my dissertation in 2020, I told him I was still hoping to include him in the manuscript. I just didn't know how. He said, "All I'll say is that whatever you use of our conversations will make me feel special." Now that I've come to the end of my journey as a graduate student, I have finally gained an understanding of what our study was about. It was an examination of dimensions between student and mentor, and the fragility of the promises between them. It was an exploration of how the help we offer is sometimes less important than the act of the offering. It was a deep dive into the relationship between a student who just wanted to be seen and heard, and the researcher that only wanted to oblige him.

He said, "Well it certainly feels like what I said to you back then was more of me venting in order to find psychological help than me expressing my insights." He added that he was "extremely unstable" during our conversations, which tainted the legitimacy of his responses.

I told him that maybe the content of conversations didn't matter. "The important part of the study was the work we did to build our relationship." I said I wanted him to feel special because he is special. I told him that he helped me become a better teacher and researcher.

"If I helped you become a better teacher and researcher, I can die happy," he said.

"You know at the very least I gotta give you a shout out," I said. "You'll see yourself somewhere in my dissertation."

"Okay, I've got a serious question for you," he said, switching the subject.

“Oh yeah?”

“Did you finish Undertale?”

Dear student, I must confess I have not finished the game you love. I promise to play it, and talk with you about it, as soon as I take care of this time problem. I’ve penciled it into my schedule, for the day after I defend this dissertation.

Sincerely,

A Teacher

Writing Without Shackles

In which the poet: divulges his process for hosting a poetry writing workshop; shares details of a mixed-media poetry lesson plan using classroom observations and field notes; and synthesizes data from a focus group and collected student poems, to learn how teens in a Rural town use poetry for catharsis, character development, and community building.

Introducing yourself as an American artist in a foreign country is a risky venture these days. People have all sorts of questions. Many meek conversations have been redirected into lines of inquiry, asking who I voted for or whether I own a gun. It is easy to get defensive, but on careful reflection, these are straightforward questions that seem related to what my values are and what company I keep. These are the types of questions deserving of contemplation. They deserve the narrative construction of a solid answer. They deserve a story as response.

Luckily, when I am confronted with these questions while travelling outside the United States, it is often because I am a touring spoken word poet and teaching artist. To answer these questions, I as a writer get the opportunity to present a counternarrative about myself, in the form of a poem. According to Kagendo Mutua (2008), "Counternarratives are stories/narratives that splinter widely accepted truths about people, cultures, and institutions" (p. 132). She explained that counternarratives challenge the commonly assumed cultural values of people, which encourages us to consider whose narratives are privileged over others. When I am a poet standing in a school auditorium, I present all sorts of counternarratives about the body everyone sees: I am a nonviolent American; I am a male feminist; I am a white antiracist; I am a business professional with bipolar disorder. When it comes to the dominant narratives of powerful institutions, Tisdell (2001) claimed that stakeholders have the option to reproduce these narratives or resist these narratives. As a white, cisgender male educator, who is a part of some major institutions of power, I will inherently reproduce some of these dominant narratives. However, I also have the choice to be thoughtful about the narratives I share, so I often use

poetry to craft counternarratives about the racist, classist, heteronormative, ableist, patriarchal paradigms that proliferate in said institutions.

Using poetry as a vehicle for creative writing is important in schools, because students write counternarratives about themselves too: I may be big guy, but I am not a bully; I may be a small girl, but I am stronger than you; I identify as neither guy or girl, but I deserve dignity. I may be the quiet kid, but I have a lot to say. I may be the "bad kid," but I have a lot of good to give. Stephen Fry (2005) explained that the "call-and-response" quality of poetry is possible because poesy functions as a dialogic narrative. Poets in the Southeast United States call this "Back Talk." At a poetry slam, someone in the audience will shout "back talk," and the rest of the crowd will yell, "talk back!" Back talk is the way writers discourse with their peers, and even predecessors too.

In the next section, I explicitly state my process for hosting all of my poetry writing activities. I then use the remainder of the chapter to share an example of a time I used this lesson in a classroom setting, to show educators how I applied my framework in a real-world context. I dedicated a portion of my analysis to talk out my process of selecting "texts" for my lesson plans. I also included examples of student work and feedback from focus groups I held with students, to invite readers to consider the ways that writers use poems to find their place in the universe.

Time, Turn, Teach, Text, Tinker, Testify

Regardless of the age and experience of participants, or the makeup of the learning space I am visiting, I follow the same six-step process every time I host a poetry writing workshop. It goes:

1. Time.
2. Turn.
3. Teach.
4. Text.

5.Tinker.
6.Testify.

Step 1: "Time" stands for "time to get to work." When students enter my classroom, they know that I will have a short, timed "warm-up" activity waiting for them. Sometimes in these five to ten minute anticipatory activities, I ask students to read a short text, like a poem or newspaper article. But most of the time I write the directive on the classroom board, in the form of a "poetry prompt." A prompt can be phrased as a question, or may be a notable quotation, or a challenge for poets to "quick write" in a certain way or about a certain subject. There are a thousand ways to craft a prompt, as long as it serves as a way to "hook" the interest of participants. I often encourage students to spend as much of the allotted time as possible writing, even if they have to push themselves past comfort. A quick-written poem is often lacking in form, but prewriting activities help students space out their thoughts onto a blank page. When students fill up blank pages with their thoughts, I encourage them to use their scribbles as a garden, to pluck fruits to replant in higher stakes writing assignments.

Step 2: "Turn" means that it is our "turn to talk." This step gives students five to ten minutes to respond to the quick prompt through facilitated discussion. This can be in the form of shoulder partners (i.e. group of two), small groups, or open class discussions. Sometimes I mix things up by asking students to write their responses on index cards to pass around, or on large sheets of "graffiti paper" I have posted on the wall. There are numerous ways to give students a turn—the most important thing to consider is how to mix things up in a way that gives all students an opportunity to share, regardless of their comforts and abilities. During the "turn" step, I encourage students to use their response to the writing prompt as a "speaking prompt": students are invited to read their writing out loud, or use it as notes to prepare an extemporaneous response. I treat opportunities to share as "invitations," and give students an option to pass if they don't feel comfortable sharing.

Step 3: "Teach" means "increasing the teaching toolbox." The "teach" step is the only opportunity I use to introduce a technical skill or concept outside of a student's toolbox. I don't lecture about numerous subjects or "drill and kill" lists of words. I take less than five minutes when providing explicit, spoken instruction, unless students ask me to expound further. The techniques introduced during the "teach" step are usually related to creative writing, but often I introduce other skills too. For example, I make sure to teach students how to employ figurative tools, like metaphor, but I also use poetry to practice cross-content techniques like memorization or public speaking. Similarly, the concepts introduced during the "teach" step are often poetry-related, but often I use poetry to introduce worldly concepts such as environmentalism, anti-bullying, mental health advocacy, or gun violence in schools. Any skill or concept can work, as long as I provide students an opportunity to practice what I preached.

Step 4: "Text" refers to the act of "reading" a "text." In practice, this can be more abstract than it sounds. The "reading" of a poetry "text" is a central activity of all my workshops, but I use quotations here because "reading" and "texts" can mean many different things. Like most teachers, a lot of the time I use a poem from a literary journal or textbook. But I also use poetry as a vehicle for critical media literacy, and believe it is an engaging practice to include "texts" that are relevant to the "out-of-school" literacy practices of students. Like many teachers, I introduce poems as performances on YouTube; I play hip-hop songs or the audio from a podcast; sometimes when practicing digital literacy skills, I introduce a poem posted in a Tweet or Instagram post. I also commonly include "texts" that are not focused on poetry, such as newspaper articles, essays, short stories, comic strips, or even visual pieces of art. Texts can be long or short. Step 4 can contain one or several texts, and I try to mix up the mediums every lesson. The text can be almost anything, but ideally it should include some "themes" present in Step 1, and should model the "skill" or "concept" from Step 3. I typically dedicate about 15 to 20

minutes of class time to this step, and help students learn how to read complex texts by assigning a "reading task." I may ask students to underline examples of a relevant concept, for example, or ask students to provide annotations next to lines that model a certain skill. The point is to show students how another author employed the tool or concept of interest, which will give them an idea of how they can employ the new tool or concept in their own writing composition.

Step 5: "Tinker" refers to the playful, creative process of "tinkering" to construct a "new text." Often the product of this tinkering is a poem—whatever that means to the writer—that responds to the previous text in some way. Perhaps this new text compliments the old text by employing a similar skill, or maybe the new text contradicts the old text by sharing a countering perspective. I help students construct their new text by inviting them to respond to the old text from Step 4, often using a writing prompt with a "poetry link." A poetry link is different than a standard poetry prompt: the directive of a poetry link prompt is co-constructed between students and teacher through the discussion of a poem. For example, when discussing the poem "From Space" by Katharine Coles (2019), students may gleam a number of themes—they may choose to focus on the topic of breakups to relationships, or they may focus on the feminist theme of leaving small men behind. Depending on the theme students want to explore more rigorously, we often craft a prompt together related to that topic that piqued their interest. Step 5 can take as little as five minutes, but this guided writing section is also an opportunity to give students extended practice with writing—sometimes I give students as much as 15 or 20 minutes, depending on how well we have practiced the executive function of writing for long periods. I often encourage writers to think back to the prewriting activity at the beginning of the lesson, to see if they can pluck out any images or thoughts to plant in the bigger garden. I use the word "tinker" instead of "write," because the construction process can take many forms. Sometimes students co-construct their poem together, or make mixed media constructions by merging text

with visual art. Unless we are writing in a specific style, like haiku, I often set open-ended expectations of what the new text should look like, and encourage students to tinker and play with the design of their poem.

Step 6: "Testify" refers to the act of inviting students to "testify" by "sharing" their new text with peers. Often this sharing is facilitated like a poetry "open mic," where students are invited to share their poem out loud, at their seat or standing in front of the room. I phrase these opportunities for testimony as invitations: students can read their poems, or they can simply share their thoughts about the discussion of the day. If students share a poem about a charged political subject or about a sensitive issue at home, I often ask if they want to talk further about their experience. Class peers are invited to ask questions and offer encouragement—or constructive feedback, when appropriate. This sharing of student work encourages further class discussion. Often my goal as a classroom facilitator is to consider how to extend these dialogues into the next lesson, and I reinforce which tools to practice if I assign creative writing homework.

Now that I have told you my six step process for teaching poetry writing, I want to show you how it looks in practice. In the next section, I also examine how the fluid nature of poetry invites students to practice a variety of literacy skills. I provide educators with some insight on using poetry as a cross-content writing practice as well. Finally, I will tie these lines of analysis together through the theme of teaching like a writer.

Adaptive Literacy, and the Astral Body

To illustrate what teaching like a writer means to me, I'd like to share a story of a recent creative writing workshop I facilitated with some high school students.

Picture this: last week I stood in the library of a town I don't live in and tried to convince a group of teenagers I just met to read me freshly penned poems they had written about themselves. Terrifying, right?

One girl held her paper in front of her like a shaken-up soda, gripping it awkwardly in case the contents exploded in her hands. If she were a turtle I guarantee her head would be retracted and hidden below her shoulders.

"Well," she said with a shrug. "It's not really a poem."

"Great," I said. "Not-real poems are my favorite."

She looked me in the eyes for the first time and saw I was unwavering in my earnestness. Instead of putting forth another challenge, she sighed and read her "not poem" to the class.

She says it's not a poem. It sounded like a poem to me, but as the poet being paid to be in the room, I have to be honest with you: I don't really care if it is a poem or not.

What mattered to me is she wrote something down and shared it with a stranger.

What mattered to me is she used a classroom activity to learn to play with words.

What mattered to me is she crafted images on a paper in a way that constructs her identity.

What mattered to me is she articulated the parts of herself that are hardest to pin down.

Whether it's a poem or not matters little to me.

The teacher of the class had spent the previous lessons teaching her students how to scan a poem—how to recognize its figurative elements and appreciate its aesthetic quality. She was teaching like a reader. This was a first introduction to poetry for many students in the class, and as the teacher explained to me later, she saw the teaching of reading as a step toward the teaching of writing. With her help, I saw an opportunity to teach like a writer: to encourage students to use words to shape themselves as characters in our world. I wanted them to think critically about which words are the best to describe themselves. Since the teacher is a friend of mine, I called her the weekend before our writing workshop to plan our lesson, and we discussed how

approaching the activity as both a reader and writer could be a great comprehensive strategy as co-facilitators.

I harbor a belief that if I teach a good poetry lesson, I will help students learn to write better in other genres, such as prose, journalism, and academic writing. That's why I promote a practice I call "adaptive literacy." Essentially, the purpose of adaptive literacy is to teach students malleable skills that they can apply to a number of aspects in practice. For example, when crafting the narrative of this chapter of an educational text, I drew upon the skills I learned as a poet: I used images to paint a description of the library and students, and used figurative tools such as metaphor to convey the mood in the room. Poets and educators share a lot of the same tools, because both roles are concerned with the pursuit and sharing of truths. In the next section, I explain my process for selecting texts that encourage students to think like writers.

"Where Do I Find Poems?"

The most common question I get from educators is "where do I find poems?" Sometimes teachers are looking for age-appropriate poems for their classroom. Other times they are asking if I know of any poems that cover a specific subjects or theme. "Everywhere!" I want to exclaim, "Poems can be found everywhere!" But I know this advice is not helpful to someone who hasn't embedded poetry into their life. I typically find poems from three different sources:

1. The crate.
2. The net.
3. The pen.

"The crate" refers to the poems I know and love, that are stored on bookshelves and table tops, and in boxes and crates in my home. They are the sage words I have framed on my office wall, and pinned on the wall of my social media. The term "crate-digging" was popularized in hip hop culture, and referred to the DJs who did their "homework" by digging into the record crates to study old songs and build their library of sound. Like these DJ's, I "crate-dig" for

poems at used book stores and literary festivals (Rocco, 2014). I listen to new hip hop and rock music when albums are released, and consider if the song lyrics would be meaningful to analyze in a classroom context. Finding poetry isn't the hard part. Finding time for poetry is the hard part. As a fellow teacher, my biggest struggle is finding time for personal reading. But there is opportunity in poetry, because of its short form. My poetry reading habit helps me discover new authors, despite my busy schedule, because I can learn a great deal about an author by spending a few minutes reading a couple pages of their work. Educators (and students) can build a surprisingly extensive knowledge base, or "crate," by dedicating just five minutes a day, five minutes a week, or even five minutes a month, to studying poetry. Every time a poem speaks to you, put it in your crate, to retrieve at a later time.

"The net" refers to poems I find doing basic keyword searches on the internet. On occasion I still use interlibrary loan to find poems in printed anthologies, but the digital age has provided so many resources a few keystrokes away. A lot of the time, I find poems when it's five minutes before class, and I am frantically searching the web for a "hook" to tie my lesson plan together. Teacher friends will sometimes message me, asking if I know of any poems covering really specific topics. One friend asked me, "Do you know of any poems written about circus animals?" I literally just typed "poems about circus animals" into Google, and spent a few minutes shuffling key words in my searches like "elephant," "gorilla," and "ringleader." After five minutes of searching, I sent my friend three recommendations, and he probably had wild assumptions about my encyclopedic knowledge of poems about circus bears. This is why it is important to consider poetry in the context of digital media literacy, because endless narrative worlds exist for people who know how to search for them. Now don't get me wrong: there is a lot of junk to sift through when searching through the Internet—because it is the Internet. Yes, there are many roughly curated "fan pages," with magenta font and pop up ads, and search

results often bring up posts from social media pages like Pinterest and reddit. It becomes easier to sift through the muck when you know some places to look online. Several prestigious literary journals and magazines have digitized their content in recent years: some of my favorite sources are Poetry Magazine, Academy of American Poets, The New Yorker, and the Kenyon Review. Some journals host a "poem-a-day" feature, tweeting out content or emailing it directly to subscribers. I try to find new poets to follow by listening to Podcasts like Divedapper, and see which artists have featured TED Talks. I also follow new artists on Twitter and Instagram who showcase their work on social media. Some of my favorite presses/publishers that cater to spoken word culture are Button Poetry, Write Bloody, Write About Now, All Def Poetry, Youth Speaks, SlamFind, and Poetry Slam, Inc, who publish content in various forms of print, audio, and video.

"The pen" refers to poems I write myself. I often share poems when meeting new students as a way to build a classroom culture of "reciprocity"—I share poems with students as a way to invite them to share poems with me (Graves, 1983). I put an effort into writing like they put an effort into writing. Now, I know I am a poet, but I think it is also important for teachers to make their writing processes visible to students. Even if a teacher considers themselves an amateur, sharing their narratives can be a way to show students that they don't need to be experts to build an identity as a writer (Gallagher, 2004). Poems are also a way to initiate conversations with students about topics outside of the English Language curriculum. Sometimes I use poetry writing as a way to ask my students how they are feeling on a particular day, or I use writing as a reflexive tool to reflect on cross-curricular content, like social studies or math. I often sit at a desk and write alongside students during guided reading time, and I share my drafts as a way to invite students to practice giving constructive criticism. Performing your writer identity in class

humanizes the process of writing for students, and frames class writing activities as collaborative in nature.

Selecting Texts for the Space Slam

Before analyzing an example of a real world writing workshop with teens, the reader might be curious to know: how did I select my tests for this lesson? Let's start with some context: the busload of teenagers, my teacher friend, and I were brought to the library through a grant from our state's humanities council. I was told that the theme of the event was about "space," and I was asked to make my lesson topical. The session would be 90 minutes long, so I had plenty of time to fill. The flier had a big photo of an astronaut on the moon, and the library provided "space-themed" snacks like Starburst candies, Sunkist soft drinks, Sun Chips, and Star Crunch and MoonPies for dessert.

I knew this was a new class, and I wanted to use poetry as an opportunity for the students to get to know one another. Yet, I was "commissioned" to construct a lesson about space, which can be a very impersonal and abstract theme to write about. Furthermore, I was expected to perform and most of my poems are about what I know: the places I have been and the people that I have met. I approached this lesson like a problem to solve. I asked myself the same question any good writer does: "how do I write my way out of this?"

Performing a poem for students is an engaging way to share literature. When I am entering a new space or working with new students, a poetry performance serves as a "prologue" to the six steps process, because it is an explosive-yet-brief way to introduce myself to the class. I like to embody the presentation of my poem like I am in the moment, feeling and sensing the scene that I am constructing for my audience. In a classroom setting, these poems also serve as models for writers looking to develop a voice of their own. If I wanted this class to share stories about themselves, I had to be the first to share my own. I approached this activity like a writer is

by asking myself, “where do I belong in all of this?” What is my positionality in the world and how does it relate to this classroom? What voice as an author do I bring to this narrative? How do my life experiences influence what stories I decide to tell?

I decided to take a cue from poet Shira Erlichman, who I follow on Twitter. She tweeted a message that says, “When asked for poetry advice my usual response is: write as a return to the body, don't underestimate your regular way of saying things, if you want to dance a kite in the sky make sure there's a string tied to your wrist” (2018). Since I wanted students to consider their own bodies and minds, and consider their stance and their construction of a worldview, I decided to cheat. Instead of sharing poems about space, I shared poems about my body moving through different spaces: a restaurant kitchen in a small college town; a subway car speeding through New York City; a tiny classroom in a maximum security prison. Like any good writer, I decided what rules I need to follow, and what rules I need to break, to craft a story that’s worth telling.

Though I shifted the theme of the event for the purposes of my performance, I did bring the class back to the topic of space by reading four short contemporary poems that used celestial metaphors. In the poetry slam community, we call brisk reading and writing activities “quick poems.” I found these one-page poems by shuffling keywords, like “space,” “planets,” and “galaxies,” while searching the digital archive of Poetry Magazine. First, we quick-read a 14-line poem called “From Space” by Katherine Coles (2019), whereas the speaker is a woman looking down from space, who sees how small her home and romantic partner are from a distance. Second, we quick-read a 16-line poem called “Man in Space” by Billy Collins (1995), whereas the speaker lampoons patriarchal society by exploring women-led planets in science fiction narratives. Third, we quick-read the 22-line poem “From Space to Time” by Carolyn M Rodgers (1978), whereas the speaker shares an abstract tale of falling away from her love in the middle of space.

Finally, I shared my own 26-line poem “Space Monkey,” whereas I embody the role of a space monkey being strapped into a shuttle. The prevailing metaphor of the poem serves as a vehicle to imagine the feelings of loss my mom tells me she experienced when sending me off to college.

Space Monkey

Mr. Monkey, my mother chimed,
don't mess your spacesuit this time.
She'd already endured my days
of dangling from her vine-like legs
and swaying from the fancy curtains,
slinging scat at my father and brother—
hooting and beating our chests in attempt
to dominate another lower order of life.
My little monkey, she said affectionately
as she strapped me into the shuttle.
I pursed my lips trying to reach her—
my opposable fingers grasping at air
as she slowly shut the safety hatch.
She said, Goodbye, and the thrusters
propelled me past the pull of gravity.
Now that I'm on the dark side of the moon,
I wonder if she is still perched there
at her worn-down radar tower,
carefully watching my approach—
hoping I've calculated the right degree.
Half hoping that I will break away
to nebulas where she can never follow,
or wishing I'd crash into a collapsed star—
a place where time stands still
and through worm holes I'd be transported
back to the Earth and into her arms.

We could have spent an hour or two unpacking these poems, but instead I wanted to just share them as quick examples. The important thing is that I modeled writing from diverse perspectives, all using poetry as a vehicle in different ways. Some of the poems were persona poems while others were simple observations. Some were humorous while others were sad. I tried to show students that poems can be anything and everything.

Now that I had enough opportunity to introduce myself, it was time for my new students to do the heavy lifting. The next section explores the six steps I took to help students write their own poems about space, and includes the perspectives of students who attended the workshop.

A Poetry Lesson in Six Steps

At last, it was time for the interactive portion of the writing workshop. To get students accustomed to writing "time" **(Step 1)**, I facilitated a 7-minute generative quick-writing activity. I wanted to use this warm-up assignment as an icebreaker: a chance for students to say, "Here is my story. What is yours?" Wishing to privilege the values and experiences of my students, I crafted a space-themed prompt I felt the students could relate to:

"When you look up at the stars, what are some of the things you dream about?"

Some students "freestyled" poems, furiously writing whatever came to their head. Some students freewrote narrative paragraphs in a stream-of-conscious style. With my encouragement, most students wrote lists of images that captured the wishes they like to whisper to the moon.

I told students it was their "turn" to share **(Step 2)**. Several students welcomed the chance to share their narratives with their peers, though many apologized, saying, "it's not really a poem." As you might guess, I did not care if they are poems. I cared that they met the expectations of the prompt. I cared that they used a writing activity to reflect on their memories and extract images that are important in their lives. My goal here wasn't to create a culminating product—that goal comes later. My aim here was for students to generate an "inventory" of images they can use during higher-stakes writing activities. I encouraged students to think of writing as gardening: we are nurturing and cultivating small ideas, and we will craft the promising ideas into stories later.

As I said previously, I don't spend long on the "teach" step **(Step 3)**. I usually decide on this step by asking myself: "what do I want students to walk away from this lesson knowing that

they did not know before?" I wanted students to practice using concrete metaphors to describe abstract feelings, by connecting images of space to the experiences of the body. I knew this concept might be unfamiliar to students in the class, and I knew I might need to bring in some outside knowledge. I first asked students to remind me what a metaphor is and why they are used in creative writing. Several students were familiar with using metaphors in their writing, and I framed the discussion in a way that privileged their expertise as young writers. Then I spent two minutes (literally just 120 seconds) contributing to the conversation by introducing Shira Erlichman's concept as "writing as a return to the body." Rather than lecture for 20 minutes, I spent two minutes discussing strategies for using external images—like stars—to talk about internal feelings of the body. By using a limited time to "tell" students what I want, I gave them more opportunity to "show" me by privileging guided writing time.

So far the first thirty minutes of the day had been a flurry of quick activities: I performed 10 minutes of poems, we spent 10 minutes analyzing four short poems, and we spent four minutes quick-writing and sharing our inventories. My lecture lasted two minutes. This is strategic. My goal was to show students that poems can be informal and accessible—that picking some up and sorting through them doesn't have to be such a huge chore. With a little practice getting familiar with poems, now it was time to dig in deeper with a higher stake reading activity **(Step 4)**. The quick-activities provided students some context and buy-in as we prepared to dive into a 15-minute deeper reading activity, unpacking three different "texts." Getting to the heart of our space theme, I passed out a news article from February 13th, 2019, when the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) declared they had lost contact forever with their rover Opportunity, on the planet Mars.

Why would a teacher read a news article in the middle of a poetry unit plan? If my blasphemous utterances such as "I don't care if a poem is a poem" haven't offended you yet, this

attitude may be the one that drives you off the ravine: I think that teachers should stop teaching poetry units. Please understand—I include poems in my lesson plans all the time. I'm kind of known as "the poem guy." And as the professed poem guy, I have to say, I think the worst disservice we do for poems is segregate them in our curriculums like some quarantined, misunderstood alien beings. I love to teach like a writer by introducing my students to great writers of numerous genres. The goal here is to show how writers of different mediums share similar stories and express them in different ways. These texts compromise a dialogue between thinkers that influences the way we discuss the happenings in the world. Poetry here is a vital voice in this discourse of texts. Poetry shouldn't be separated from the conversations of the world. That's why my poetry instruction includes newspaper articles, music videos, short stories, song lyrics, comic books, short films, videos of interviews, photographs, paintings, and even digital media like tweets and memes. While some voices in the academy want poetry to be an elevated and hard-to-understand thing, I feel that it is much more necessary to show that poetry is relevant and applicable to everyday conversations.

Several students lamented when I passed out the article, in part for comedic effect, because they said they knew the news story and that it made them sad. The Opportunity rover landed on Mars in January, 2004, and was originally built to only serve a 90-day mission. The Opportunity survived for more than 14 years and provided scientists with critical data that changed the world's understanding of the environment of Mars. The "plucky robot" as the article describes it, became somewhat of an ambassador for NASA and space exploration in popular culture, and many people have developed a similar affinity that some feel about robots from science fiction, like R2D2 and Wall-E. In June of 2018 Opportunity was caught in the middle of a planet-wide dust storm and lost contact with NASA. The organization declared the rover officially dead after they failed to reestablish contact after several months.

"It's so sad!" one student interrupted, clutching the article in faux distress.

"Okay," I said, "but *why* is it sad?" I reminded students that the rover is really just a lifeless machine, a heap of working parts intended to only last 90 days.

"It's still sad!" another student said, and I asked him to consider why we as living, feeling beings have projected our emotions onto something that is not alive. Some students said we care about it because the rover taught us so much about the world, and now it is gone. Others said that the longevity of the rover meant that it had been active for most of their conscious lives, and that it was something like a character they grew up with. Some said the story of trying to reconnect with the lost rover was suspenseful, and reminded them of other times they had to clutch hope close to their chest. This dialogue was a way for students to consider how people use concrete objects to help make sense of abstract feelings, like joy, loneliness, and regret. This is akin to what poet William Carlos Williams meant when he said, "There are no ideas but in things." Objects and images from popular culture, like the Opportunity, can become metaphorical vehicles for people to articulate and compare their oft-abstract emotions. The robot becomes a common character for people of different lived experiences, an object to refer to. I asked students to think about how the characters in our everyday lives affect the characters we construct through the writing of our poems.

After spending time discussing the article we spent a few minutes studying some "alternative texts" to gain a better understanding of the story. A major goal was to show students how diverse writers utilize their voice in different ways to tell the story in a unique way.

The first alternative text I shared was a song. We learned from the article that NASA sent a final transmission to the rover after contact was lost, and symbolically chose a recording of "I'll Be Seeing You," popularized by the late American jazz singer Billie Holiday.

I'll Be Seeing You (1938)

In all the old familiar places
That this heart of mine embraces
All day and through
In that small cafe
The park across the way
The children's carousel
The chestnut trees
The wishing well

I'll be seeing you
In every lovely summer's day
In everything that's light and gay
I'll always think of you that way

I'll find you in the morning sun
And when the night is new
I'll be looking at the moon
But I'll be seeing you

I'll be seeing you
In every lovely summer's day
In everything that's light and gay
I'll always think of you that way

I'll find you in the morning sun
And when the night is new
I'll be looking at the moon
But I'll be seeing you

Composed by Sammy Fain
Lyrics by Irving Kahal
Sung by Billie Holiday

Though we're teaching like a writer, learning best practices for reading is still an important skill to model, and the song gave students an opportunity to use the academic skills of scanning a poem to "read" a text from popular culture. I wanted to use the song to get students to think about their own voices as writers, so I included some guiding questions for their discussion:

1. Why do you believe this song was picked as the last transmission?
2. What are some of the themes in the song that relate to you?
3. How did the story about the Opportunity rover make you feel, and have you ever felt a similar way about missing a person or thing?

The second alternative text is the transcript of an interview from the radio. I used the opportunity of having a cooperating teacher in the room and invited my friend to use a "reader's theatre" technique to perform an interview between a journalist and a scientist on the Opportunity project. A goal was to get students to listen to the fluidity of language in conversation, and consider how a lively dialogue can influence their written work. Together, we taught like writers by promoting the practice of playing with words. This "alternative" reading activity encouraged students to consider how they can take this story, play with it, and make it their own.

The third alternative text(s) I included were memes from digital media. I projected images of memes that digital artists made about the opportunities last transmission. The last transmission that NASA received from Opportunity was a series of technical information, which was paraphrased by science reporter Jacob Margolis to mean, "My battery is low and it's getting dark." All of the memes include an image of the rover sitting isolated on a huge surface of dust with a vast view of space in the background. Using a meme was a way to isolate a single sentence from a larger text to study and impact—a best practice in poetry reading. "It's so sad!" the same student exclaimed. I shared a quote with the student from poet Richard Hugo, who said, "Once language exist only to convey information, it is dying." As a class we discussed how even though the rover was just conveying information, the message made us sad because of the context we included in our reading of the message. This conversation became an opportunity for students to consider how narratives about things are constructed.

After an hour of reading stories, listening to stories, talking about stories, and thinking about stories, it was time for students to write some stories of their own **(Step 5)**. Now, if I was teaching like a reader, I might task students to write something that utilizes some technical skill, or assess whether they can follow the structure of a certain writing convention. Perhaps they

could write couplets in iambic pentameter of show they can explore themes that were vital to Victorian poets. However, I wanted to teach like a writer. I wanted students to use a poem like a lantern to help them wander through the winding caverns in their mind. I shared the following prompt:

> Pick a thing (or person) in your life that you are missing today. **If you had to broadcast one last message to them, what would that message be?** You are welcome to use the metaphor of a robot lost in space, or think of an image or metaphor on your own. The articles and the song are both happy and sad, so feel free to adopt whatever mood you want to craft your poem. Please ask for help if you need some encouragement!

Some students become frozen in their seats when they are given unprecedented freedom in a classroom assignment. I blame the prescriptive nature of schooling, where tasks are parsed out in such a way that students never have to make critical decisions as writers. While most successful writers follow a structured, rigorous process, this is different than having an elder standing over your shoulder, telling you what to write and how. Open-ended prompts can be a way for students to free themselves from limited expectations, and instead think about how they can use their voice in a unique way to tell a personalized story. Some students immediately dived into the assignment, while others hesitated—their eyes seemingly stuck to the vastness of their blank page. All it took was a little encouragement, and after a couple minutes every student was scribbling in their journals. If students became discouraged, I just redirected them back to some of the formative questions about images we asked during the reading activities: "how can we visualize the environment around you in the moment?" "What does the feeling you are describing look like to a stranger?" "What concrete images could serve as anchors as you tell this narrative?"

Once a student feels autonomy in a classroom lesson, it is impressive to see how they manipulate a prompt to meet their own goals. When I invited students to share their work **(Step 6)**, one young girl walked to the front of the room with a defiant stride, and read a poem that declared she was saying goodbye to her anxiety forever. To promote engagement and classroom

community, I encouraged students to clap and cheer for their peers, and the room erupted in support as the young woman delivered her testimony, despite shaking lips and trembling hands. Another student read an emotionally charged poem about losing his sister to cancer, and the end included all the things he wished he could have said to her. When his poem concluded, several students and adults were crying in the room, and numerous peers stood to embrace the young man as he returned to his seat. These connections are vital for the teaching like a writer model, because authors have utilized the encouragement and support of networks of like-minded peers since the beginning of time. This is how you construct an assignment in a way that fosters classroom community.

Though the lesson plan was about space, students use their writing time to incorporate a voice that is often deemed "off limits" in other realms of education. I always try to dedicate time to open-group sharing, even if it is me asking 1 or 2 people to read something in the remaining 60 seconds of class. However, there is not always an opportunity for everyone to share, so I also invite students to share their thoughts and work with me later in one-on-one interactions. One participating student later explained to me that she and her friends use poetry to make parts of their lives more visible:

> Normally people are, like, closed in. And we hide ourselves. But when we are doing poetry, a lot of people can finally say what they want to. And they feel the need to reveal their secrets, basically. Poetry provides an outlet to their feelings.

She shared the poem she wrote during the workshop with me. The poem was about the death of her grandfather, who her little brother nicknamed "Nemo" in his infancy—after his favorite movie "Finding Nemo." She told me that her favorite memory of him would be holidays, when he would call and pretend to be Santa Claus ("Ho Ho Ho") or a Thanksgiving Turkey ("Gobble, Gobble"). Creative writing activities invite students to include narratives of

their family lives into classroom curricula. The student took advantage of the fluid quality of poetry, using "swimming" as a metaphor to time travel through all her memories of his passing.

"Grandpa Nemo"

Just keep swimming
I tell you as you lay there
I look up to you
Cold smelly hospital room
My 7 year old eyes confused

Just keep swimming
It is Christmas
My mom gets the dreaded phone call
After happy moments surrounded by family

Just keep swimming
I'm sitting in the pews
My mother is dabbing her eyes
With a tissue, telling me it is okay to cry

Just keep swimming
Thanksgiving
I am waiting for a happy phone call
Gobble gobble
You used to say

Just keep swimming
Six years after you passed
It is Christmas for another year
I wanted so badly for a phone call from Santa
Ho ho ho
My mom is silent
Upset
Just keep swimming
I miss you

I asked her if she wrote the entire poem in the workshop, and she explained that she added the last stanza a few days later. She explained how she decided on the revision:

> I felt like ending it there just didn't feel right. I felt like I needed to finally say *I miss you* and *I love you*.

I thanked her for sharing her poem with me, and asked her if there was anything that teachers could learn from the poetry writing experience. She told me that she wished she had

more opportunities to read emotionally engaging content in school, so that classroom communities could form the language to talk about the harsh realities that students sometimes face.

> If we read something about suicide, it would open our eyes to many things. Or if we read something about having anxiety, that could help somebody in class. So I feel like teachers should be allowed to push that on us, and not necessarily say we need help. But they should give us an outlet.

When I asked her group of friends if they feel like adults are scared of their emotions, they shouted in unions, "Yes!" The author of the Grandpa Nemo poem explained:

> I feel like a lot of adults, they'll look at high school students, and be like "they're just going through a rough time." I know a lot of people have said to me: "This is going to pass." "This is just a phase you are going through." "You're going to be okay in the future." I would want someone to look at me, and not just see that I'm upset. And that I am "not okay." I want someone to see the inner parts of me. I want people to get to know me. I want people to get to know other people.

Stars Are Doors, And Other Lessons

In my experiences as a teaching artist, I am often surprised by the emotional depth of the poems written in my workshops. It demonstrates that students are engaging with literacy and communication activities in authentic ways. Conversations about emotion are more common in American classrooms, but poetry also provides an opportunity for educators who feel awkward talking about difficult subjects with their students. I heard lots of stories about grief that day, but I didn't need to say anything about the experiences of this classroom community 90 minutes away from my home. All I had to do was provide a space for students to tell their stories, and agree to listen. I sponsored a space and served as witness. We learned some literacy skills along the way, but the focus of the days was on narrative testimony. Six months after the Space Slam, I visited my teacher friend's classroom to see if I could interview students and ask them what perspectives they might have for educators. I asked students to analyze their poems, because this reflexive practice could give me insight into the stories that they often don't share. I was

delighted when I stepped into the school, to find that the shy author of the "not-real" poem had decided to fortify her storytelling skills by joining the drama club and poetry slam club. I asked her how poetry helped her develop a voice as a writer. She said:

> Poetry is like a truth serum. You can say whatever you want, and you won't get in trouble. Because it is art. And we have the freedom to speak however we want. So, like, we can say something and others don't agree. We're like: it's our opinion. It's how we feel. You don't have to agree.

I asked her what educators could learn from our poetry writing experience, and like her peers, she focused on the topic of making emotion visible in the classroom. Her message to educators was:

> Don't try to shield us or protect us from the bad things. Like the emotional, mental, or physical pain that comes with stuff. We'll read, like, Edgar Allen Poe, but we don't read stuff that is "emotional." And if teachers let us read stuff that was more emotional, then more people would see poetry as something they can turn to.

Instead of talking about literacy or composition, we talked about issues important to her, like student anxiety, suicide, and bullying. She said when she was younger:

> I got in the mindset of "I don't want to be alive."

At this, her voice broke, and she started crying. I assured her it's okay to cry. She apologized, saying the tears are a stress response. When she gathered herself, she explained how programs like poetry slam and drama club "brought out another side" of herself she said she didn't know was there:

> I was bullied, and nowadays people talk to me, and now they get to know me. Because people didn't see me as someone who was like, open. And they could talk to me. They thought, "Oh, that's that weird girl who dresses in all black and dyes her hair weird colors. But now I'm more open to talking to people. Now I'm more open, if someone comes up to me, I'll talk to them and they will talk to me. And we'll just be friends. Because now, I'm more like friends with everybody, and not just my group of friends.

I was surprised when she showed me a poem, and I recognized it immediately—it was a poem about looking at the stars. "I thought this was a not-real poem," I said smiling. She explained:

> I feel like when I write in paragraph form, its more factual than feeling. So, when I break it down into stanzas, I'm able to insert how I am feeling at certain points.

Looking at the paper, I realized she turned her "not real" poem into a "real poem," transforming her scribbled paragraph into a typed poem with line breaks. Though we may have focused our class conversation on emotion—and not on craft and form—she created a remarkable poem that demonstrated her mastery of the lesson's aim. An excerpt of her poem read:

> The stars,
> oh the stars.
> They represent the endless possibilities that would trouble my mind forever.
> Endless possibilities that will shape me into hopefully a
> smarter, happier, more open minded human
> that walks the earth beneath them.
>
> Stars are doors that lead to a future where life is better than before.
> Where life offers many options.
> And they only brighten the time left ahead.
> With stars I see the smiles to come later in life.
> The joy that is left to feel.
>
> But in those stars I see the pain that came before.
> The nights spent looking up asking why?!
> The pain that left tears trailed down my cheeks,
> dripping off my chin,
> landing on the words written to let my feelings out.
>
> They represent the space I give myself to learn to be alone.
> Because the stars show me survival, even when no one is there.

No Hassle

In which the poet: writes an autoethnographic account of his first experiences as a qualitative researcher; synthesizes observation and field notes of Last Chance to tell a story of precarity in alternative education; and revisits some poems that impacted his identity as a teacher.

When I stepped off the bus the street was slick with rain. Pulling my pant legs high, I searched the street signs for any word familiar. The shuttle shifted into drive and roared away and I tried to find my bearings. The city looked different in the dark. I pulled out my phone: tapped it like an aquarium with a floating fish inside. Screen frozen. It was October and the morning was mean enough to make the streets smoky. As the first streaks of crimson bled above the tree line my phone screen restarted. GPS said the school was a mile-and-a-half away, and I started walking. My pant cuffs were splashed with mud. I realized I forgot to wear my belt.

Last night I didn't know I'd start today dressing myself in the dark, rubbing my eyes while searching online for a bus schedule to a city I'm new to. It was the Fall of 2014 and I was a straggler who just joined a three-year-deep research team. My first school visit was supposed to be next week, but I received an email at 8:32 pm the previous evening from the project head:

> Adam, can you get to [the school] for period one, at 8:50? The 9th graders are doing poetry and song lyrics. I know this is short notice, so if this doesn't work, we'll go on Tuesday.

I sent an email back at 11:59 pm saying I'd be there. It was barely my second year of a PhD, and I was still too scared to say no. I kept a low profile my first year in the program, but lately professors in the department had started referring to me as "the spoken word poetry guy." I used to be a full-time poet, but I decided to try grad school because I thought it would be less of a hustle. Says a lot about what I know.

Three-quarters of a mile from the school my pocket hummed. A 7:06 am email from the project lead said I shouldn't go, that she didn't know it would be such a hassle. It's hard to tell your supervisor that you're poor and have no car. No bike. No spouse to punch your arm when

you sleep through the alarm or kids barreling through your bedroom door. But I was 40 minutes into my trek already and I told her it'd be farther to turn back now. She wrote back, "need a ride?" I told her I'll meet her there. It's no hassle. Really. As I turned on the bike trail that heads toward the school, I noticed Wildstyle graffiti scrawled across the backs of the abandoned buildings. I remember feeling glad none of it had been buffed out. I get sad when creative delinquency is erased with white paint.

This chapter is about a commonly known, yet unsolved problem in the United States: all of us in education are broke. Students are broke. Teachers are broke. And the artists who visit schools—whose writing fills the curricula, and whose words serve as inspiration on the walls—are broke too. I should know. Though I was new to research in 2014, I could attest to the grind of all three roles. I was a graduate student, working at the university as a graduate teaching assistant, and moonlighting as a poet and teaching artist. Despite a graduate assistant stipend, a fellowship, and my supplemental income, I would accrue over 120,000 dollars of student loan debt in the coming years. Being broke is not just a statement about economic status. Being broke is about all the hurdles that poverty forces you to travel through. Broke is about the conflicting decisions one must make, just to make it. This sentiment was expressed in the poem "Broke," by my friend and colleague Too Black, who sent me a personal copy via email. The first stanza read:

> What's broke?
> Broke is when I can't afford either/or
> Broke is when I elect myself to take a hard vote
> "Soooo am I going to pay the energy bill or the car note?"
> Broke is when the idea of paying both bills
> never enters the voting booths of my mind
> It's a simple proposition: I either keep my heat on or I drive

Apparently I chose to keep the heat. This chapter is not just an examination of poverty. It is an examination of precarity. Using stories of my first day as a field researcher, this chapter explores all the hassles of the hustle. This chapter also examines the tensions between passive

and active models of classroom ethnography. Most importantly, this chapter begs stakeholders to answer a question often posed to artists, teachers, and students alike: do we really have to suffer for our work?

"Cause I Ain't Got a Pencil"

The last mile to the school was a slow, steady incline. Rain had seeped into the cracks of my shoe soles. My shins felt like they were going to splinter into pieces. When I finally made it to the school, I searched for the right words to describe my first impressions of the space. The building was plain. Not quite a brutalist style, but a big gray brick nonetheless. There was no football field or basketball court. No visuals of a rowdy mascot were anywhere to be seen. The only place to congregate was a single picnic table, just a few feet from the front door. The poet in me tried to find a fitting metaphor, but I couldn't think of anything alive to compare the building to.

As I ascended the steps, I wondered to myself whether I needed to check my attitude. Members of this research team have a thing about "deficit thinking." In the field of education, Valencia (1997) referred to deficit thinking as the "positing that the student who fails in school does so because of internal deficits or deficiencies" (p. 2). More generally, deficit thinking is an act of valuing students by what they are missing, instead of what they have. As a broke grad student, as a starving artist, I understood this. I was not broken. I was not empty.

Still, in my initial conversations with members of the research team, I had been challenged for using deficit language in ways that seemed to extend outside of Valencia's student-centered conceptualization. The term "deficit thinking" was brought up when I criticized the prescriptive practices of teachers, for example, or when I challenged the colonist practices of institutions. Like any white male educator, I was not exempt from critique regarding my implicit bias; however, I was skeptical of colleagues who used the term "deficit thinking" to defend

gatekeepers and institutions of power. This deviation in definition is an example of the neoliberal tendency to weaponize critical discourses to advocate for the status quo. This was a tough position for a poet to find themselves in, because poetry is largely about naming things (Ramirez, 2013). Poetry may not have the power to solve the underdiscussed issues of society, but it does have the power to shed light on them (Monet, 2017). These clashes were not the first time my role as poet had been likened to buzzkill.

I joined the team, in part, to fulfill a requirement for a 700 level course that tasked students with completing a classroom ethnography research project. The expectations were for me to sit quietly on a stool in the back of the classroom room, and take field notes in a journal. After class observations, I would write annotations on the field notes, scan them, and then turn the copies into the Principle Investigator. Other members of the research team conducted interviews with student focus groups, but I did not sit in on many of these sessions. I interviewed a couple teachers, but other than that my role was pretty passive. As a student I had started to learn about experimental methods, such as "poetic representation" (Richardson, 1997). I thought maybe I could dabble in it, and practice honing a voice as a creative qualitative researcher. Maybe I could use poetry to add some nuanced narratives, to voice the deviations in perspective we shared as stakeholders. I was told no, in so many words. The expectation was for me to keep it old school: to be invisible in appearance and clinical in tone.

All of us on the team called the project site Last Chance High. It's the pseudonym we used, and lots of other educators seemed to get the term (Kelly, 1993). The actual name of the school is much more academic sounding. Looks good on the front of a polo shirt. But really, Last Chance is a dumping ground (Groth, 1998). Teachers knew it. Administrators knew it. Worse, the kids knew it. A teen would get suspended or arrested too many times or bullied too much at their

high school, and the school would say "spend some time at Last Chance. Get your affairs in order and then you can come back." But everyone knows the truth. No one ever comes back.

According to the U.S. News & World Report, Last Chance High has a total student enrollment of 73 students: with a reported gender breakdown that is 62 percent male and 38 percent female, with a 15 percent minority enrollment. Grades 9 – 12 are served at the school, and there is a 9:1 student-teacher ratio. 77% of students are on free-or-reduced price lunch, and call me biased but I feel like teachers are the only ones who really know what that means. The graduation rate is roughly 33%.

Researchers often use numbers to describe the value of people and places, and this is particularly true of students. It can be difficult for educators and researchers to break away from using quantitative measures of value. Poetry can be helpful to qualitative researchers. Van Rooyan et al. (2019) found using poetry to be a more humane way to introduce participants, because poets often construct images with thick description rather than listing a checkbox of descriptors. This is one reason poetry resonates with people uniquely, as evidenced by the popularity of the viral poem "Cause I Ain't Got a Pencil," about an underresourced student in a Baltimore public school.

I woke myself up
Because we ain't got an alarm clock
Dug in the dirty clothes basket,
Cause ain't nobody washed my uniform
Brushed my hair and teeth in the dark,
Cause the lights ain't on
Even got my baby sister ready,
Cause my mama wasn't home.
Got us both to school on time,
To eat us a good breakfast.
Then when I got to class the teacher fussed
Cause I ain't got no pencil

Though the poem is often attributed to an anonymous Baltimore student, the poem was actually written by a teaching artist named Joshua T. Dickerson. Dickerson told a journalist from

The Baltimore Sun that he was inspired to write the poem in April 2014, when he saw a student ask their teacher for a pencil at a school in Atlanta. According to the article, "the teacher said they'd give the student a pencil, but only if he traded in one of his shoes as collateral" (Richman, 2018, p. 9). Dickerson's story is a stark reminder that reciprocal teaching is more than a simple act of giving and taking in student-teaching relationships. "The child took off the shoe and he had a dirty sock on and it caused the other students in the class to laugh at him," Dickerson said. "I wrote a story about what I imagined happened prior to that moment" (p. 10).

The author mentioned that most people focus on the topic of student poverty when they share a meme of the poem, but he also wanted people to focus on the resilience of the protagonist shown in the first 10 lines. "The main message," he said, "is that you must continue to fight, regardless of circumstances" (Richman, 2018, p. 13). Educators commonly refer to stick-to-itiveness as "grit," (Duckworth, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007), though this concept has also been critiqued as "taking a heavily impoverished view of human motivation" (Mehta, 2015, p. 3). Researchers who were on my team called the skills and cultural knowledge that students possess "funds of knowledge" (Moll et al., 1992), which is language I felt comfortable taking up. Where I started to feel icky is when my colleagues started talking about "dark funds of knowledge" (Zipin, 2009), which explicitly refers to the "dark lifeworlds" that disadvantaged students also bring to the classroom. The term made me uncomfortable because, from my perspective, it serves to fetishize student trauma, and frames the lived experiences of students as a binary of good and bad. It is during these initial visits to Last Chance High that I began to see the limitations of academic language.

"I Wish We Did This Every Day"

When I finally made it to the right classroom, a woman with withdrawn shoulders greeted me at the door. "You must be Adam," the teacher said with a smile. She said it's nice to meet me,

and I was taken aback by how earnest she sounded. Shouldn't be an unfamiliar thing to hear in a school. Now the poet in me wished I could describe her classroom as busy. Paper airplanes and chaos. Truth is most of the high schoolers were slouched and staring at their desks. One student asked to go to the bathroom. Another wandered around the room asking to visit the water fountain. Not the most engaging ethnography. "Sorry they're so sleepy this morning," the teacher said, pecking her pointer finger at the overhead projector.

Though the period was nearly over, I arrived just in time for the poetry and song lyric unit. Many teachers use poetry and song lyrics as a form of "culturally relevant teaching," (Ladson-Billings, 1992) where a facilitator "uses the student's culture to help them create meaning and understand the world" (p. 106). While passing out printed lyrics and waiting for the computer to queue, the teacher informed the class they were going to analyze a popular music video. When the clip began the unmistakable mandolin notes of R.E.M.'s *Losing My Religion* made me swallow air, and in a rush of seconds I was eleven years old again making mixtapes from a blaring radio and falling in love at first sight for the first time. That legendary line: "The lengths that I will go to / the distance in your eyes" (1991). And as I gushed I looked around and see how vacant all the stares were in the room. The kids' eyes were far away and the adults in class had not walked far enough to get to them. They didn't see flashbacks of busting out bad Michael Stipe dance moves at their middle school social. The song the teacher and I love was written 10 years before they were even born and everyone was bored.

Just then Jacob the scoffy blonde student who went to the restroom walked back in and said "you're old Sally," and harped how her music is dinosauric and that we shouldn't be talking about religion anyway.

"You can call me Mrs. Birch." the teacher responded calmly.

"But will I?" he snorted. Mrs. Birch looked like she got slugged in the stomach.

Then Elizabeth in the seat next to him said she liked the song and that he should shut up and that the song isn't even about religion at all.

"What would you know, you Jew cake." He said.

"What?"

"It's a metaphor."

"Fuck off," Elizabeth said, staring through her hair.

The words seemed to only be shocking to Sally and me. The bell rang and the students shuffled out while Sally seemed to look around for some misplaced manual that describes how to respond to something like that. One of the two Black students in class started banging a more upbeat rhythm with his pencil and palms on the desk. Elizabeth slung her backpack on her shoulder so hard it looked like she's running away from home. "I wish we did this every day," she said. "I would pass." As she headed out the door she said she was going to look at the lyrics more when she gets home tonight.

When the class was over, I wanted to speak candidly to the teacher about what went wrong, but we had yet to develop such a level of trust as collaborators. This anecdote points to a common misconception that poetry is inherently culturally relevant. For example, it is still common practice for hip hop pedagogues to share song lyrics from acts such as KRS-One, NWA, and Public Enemy, even though their height of cultural relevance took place in the 1980s. I learned this the embarrassing way years ago, when I was a volunteer teacher in a juvenile detention. I thought it would be cool to use the lyrics of 90s era artists like Tupcac, Biggie, Nas, and Snoop Dog to explain poetic devices like metaphor and onomatopoeia. One student raised his hand and said, "Uh, Mr. Henze, this is the music that our parents listen to." Everyone laughed.

Still, it was clear that one student found the activity more engaging than the typical English lesson plan. This suggested that it can be an engaging act for teachers to share their favorite songs, poems, and other forms of media. However, sharing a favorite text with students is only a culturally engaging act if students are invited to share the texts they value too. This is how educators can take a pedagogy that treats literature as bankable knowledge to deposit in a student's brain (Freire, 1970), and transform it into a critical pedagogy of story sharing (Shen, Lesh, & Vernier, 2003). This is an important reframing for teachers invested in challenging their deficit-centered attitudes, because a culturally-relevant, student-centered pedagogy encourages students to shape the curriculum with the texts and stories of their own lifeworlds.

In short, the REM lesson plan was an earnest attempt, yet a missed opportunity to build a discursive, culturally relevant poetry unit. When the Principle Investigator arrived at the school, I told her about the misstep that I witnessed. I thought fostering a conversation about discursive story sharing could help support the teacher tweak her lesson, and make it more authentically engaging. Unexpectedly, my mentor pushed back against my assessment. She told me that I shouldn't hold such a deficit view of teachers, who are all just trying their best. I walked out of the school, humming in my head.

> But that was just a dream
> Try, cry, why try?
> That was just a dream, just a dream
> Just a dream, dream

"How Come We Gotta Be Here?"

There is a common misconception that being a poet is a passive act (Alter, 2019). In the public mind, we sit and sigh while staring out the window, lazily scribbling in a journal while listening to the rain. There is a fallacy in framing witnessing as an acquiescent act. I imagine assumptions of inaction are also made about researchers. In terms of my expectations as an ethnographer, our protocols for data collection reiterated the expectation that I should be

removed. Disinterested. Silent. I should sit in the back corner and take notes and try to be invisible. Like the teens at Last Chance need another dispassionate white man quietly jotting words in the back of their classroom.

This is to say that every day I sat discreetly at Last Chance, I wanted to stand up out of my chair. I wanted to ask the students questions about themselves—questions that didn't follow a prescriptive interview protocol. I wanted to share stories instead of trading stories. I understood the wish to privilege the stories of youth, but what did it mean to omit stories of my struggles in a discussion about student failure? If my stories of strife were absent, then didn't the story of struggle become a story prescribed to "the other?" How could I talk about academic hardship, and make no mention of my tendency to stress eat? Or drink too much? If I had the opportunity to share a poem, I would tell the class that I almost didn't make it to school today either. I would tell them I sometimes wash my dress socks in the sink and dry them with a space heater before teaching. But instead, I said nothing. I said nothing about spiraling and panic attacks and worrying about whether my loan will go through before rent is due. I never said I want to call in sick every day and lay in bed. I never said I always stop a second when I see a *help wanted* sign in a restaurant window. Instead, I sat in the back, and didn't say anything about myself.

I try to be a good team member, and "fix my gaze" upon the students in the room. It was during my first week of visiting Last Chance High that I learned the research team was interested in documenting "student resistance." The Principal Investigator was fascinated in the various ways students rebelled in the face of stigma and prescriptive schooling in an underresourced space. And yes, in my initial visits I saw a lot of quirky ways students exhibited disruptive behavior. One afternoon comes to mind when a student decided he was going to hop down the hallway and enter all the classrooms by kicking the door open with his foot. There was one teen

who sometimes stood up in the middle of class and laid on top of his desk when he was bored. It was hard not to laugh when he did this, but I never wrote that part down.

While the student-focused data of our study was fascinating to me too, I felt guilt when I wrote about students. I was afraid I would write them as absurd. Because they were not absurd. They're school environment was absurd. Most of their home lives were absurd. And the teens having screaming fits and calling Sally a bitch were acting exactly as expected in a space where school is a 20-year-old textbook and growing up is getting your GED and getting out the door. That didn't sound like rebellion to me. That sounded like conditioning.

Frederick Douglass (1866) once said "the thing worse than rebellion is the thing that causes rebellion" (p. 9). I don't think I can ever let go of that lens in observation, and maybe that is why I was struggling to integrate into this team. Richardson (1997) claimed that when we as researchers frame ethnographic studies as resistance narratives we have "dialogically tied ourselves to what we oppose" (p. 78). She called them "weak representations" because the narratives reinforce dominant and non-dominant hierarchies in the eyes of those we claim to serve. Instead of focusing on behavior, I started to focus on systems. Poets think this way—search for patterns, connections between things in different spaces. The scenes that started sticking with me more were stories of feeling alienated in a harsh space; of students railing to friends because their backpacks were searched by the liaison officer with no cause given; of students shutting down when their antiquated, scuffed up class laptop shuts off unexpectedly erasing their paper.

One day in class, a student with hoodie drawstrings pulled tight, with head buried in arms, shouted into his desk "How come we got to be here?!" I thought it was a pretty good question. Why did he have to be here in this school with no marching band or debate team or football games to go on Thanksgiving weekend or booster club booths to work at the county fair?

What turns occurred that landed him in a school where the only place the mascot can be seen is on a fuzzy graphic at the bottom of the school district website? And why did teachers have to spend their veteran years here, worrying the school is going to be closed each legislative session? And me with my mud-stained pants and the team and the office administrator who sees a shooting gallery of subs go by her window each day: why were any of us here?

My first year in grad school, I turned to peer reviewed articles and resource books to find the answers to tough questions. After a couple of semesters, I returned to an old habit. In moments I found academic texts limited in their depth of a subject area, I sometimes turned to poetry. While sitting in my chair at Last Chance, I often recalled the first stanza of a poem by Peter Spiro (1994), which first encouraged me to become an educator in public school:

> Cause you are poor
> you go to public school.
> Cause public school is free
> you get a lousy education.
> Cause you get a lousy education
> you are uneducated.
> Cause you are uneducated
> you are treated with contempt.
> Cause you are treated with contempt
> you are contemptuous of others.
> Cause you are contemptuous of others
> you do not abide by the rules.
> Cause you do not abide by the rules
> you do not have a job.
> Cause you do not have a job
> you steal.
> Cause you steal
> you go to prison.
> Cause you go to prison
> your life is wasted.
> Cause your life is wasted
> you are angry.
> Cause you are angry
> you are dangerous.
> Cause you are dangerous
> you are a bad effect.

"I Would Retire If I Could"

One day in March I walked into class and Sally seemed earnestly pained by my presence. "Great. You came to watch DJ read," she said standing in her empty room. The teenager sat in a bean bag chair in the corner, her feet propped and reading *The Hunger Games*. She was wearing the same clothes as the other day. The lights were off and there was no noise. Sally was a national board certified teacher, and now at Last Chance she was a babysitter with a YA library. She stared downward at her desk like she was playing a game of chess, and she was lamenting that her opponent had taken her Bishop, her Knight, her Rook, her Queen.

When DJ left for lunch, Sally proceeded to lose it a little, "It's embarrassing," she said. "Other teachers here have thirty to thirty five students in their class. It's crazy. Like, why should I even be here?"

"How did this happen," I asked. "Because you got in an argument with the counselor?"

"She wanted to get the schedules done fast," she said. "I dunno." She trailed off, almost like she had spent too much time explaining the plot of a book no one else has read. One thing that often goes unsaid at alternative schools is how the instructors there are stigmatized too. Just like the kids, all eight teachers at Last Chance were there by choice, chance, or circumstance. And they were stuck, though Sally may never say something like that. The fact that they had worked there made them undesirable to hire in some places. Sally stared into her computer screen, deleting emails because it seemed she doesn't know what else to do with her grief. "I would retire if I could," she said. "But I can't."

The scene reminded me of a haiku I wrote when I started working in alternative schools:

empty classroom desks
plotted along in lined rows
gray headstones

One of the reasons I felt helpless to intervene at Last Chance was because usually I visit classrooms as a teaching artist. When I am invited to a school, I typically have a stance and a voice to use as a teaching tool. Sadly, Last Chance didn't have a discretionary budget to bring in guest lecturers or workshop facilitators to play a role. Many of the schools I visit have sizable endowments and parent-run booster club meetings. This school didn't even have a library, let alone a librarian to surf the web and find grant funding for special events. I went to public school too, but throughout the years we brought in authors, musicians, actors, and even magicians.

Researchers and journalists have recently focused on the issue of precarity in education, particularly focusing on topics such as the low wages of teachers (Will, 2019), student homelessness and food insecurity (Golden, 2019), and the fiscal instability of institutions (Haque, 2012). There is little research, however, that speaks to the topic of precarity in the lives of teaching artists, who often must negotiate multiple contracts with substandard pay, benefits, and resources (Farr, 2016). Relevant to this study is the growth of the "gig economy," which has been expanding rapidly since the term was coined during the financial crisis a decade ago (Frazer, 2019). Recent data shows that nearly 73% of faculty positions at universities are now off the tenure track (Flaherty, 2018), and many school districts around the country have implemented hiring freezes in response to budget shortfalls (Solochek, 2019; Stein, 2019). As a result, many artists and educators now must rely on "insecure, unsupported positions with little job security and few protections for academic freedom," (Flaherty, 2018) and/or supplement their income by freelancing as teaching artists in an unpredictable "poetry gig" market. There were a couple times I visited Last Chance with my fist tucked inside my sleeve because I couldn't wipe the stamp from some jazz bar or comedy club clean in the shower.

Though schools with means commonly employ teaching artists, they can also be found working in alternative schools like Last Chance. Before I was a researcher at Last Chance, I

worked at a nonprofit organization that placed me at two alternative schools. I taught a hip hop pedagogy class, focused on literacy and communication. One school decided to downsize most of their English teachers, and supplement their English and Language Arts curriculum with distance learning and our biweekly program. The move made me wonder why I as a teaching artist might be pitted against a full time teacher, in a learning space that needed as many supports and resources they could get. One of the most urgent aspects to consider in the current educational climate is the increasingly volatile guarantee that there is a place for arts and humanities teachers in schools (Cooper et al., 2017; Naylor, 2017). A 2011 study sponsored by The University of Chicago (Rabkin et al., 2011) suggested there may be a correlation between budget cuts in the United States and the increased use of teaching artists in educational institutions:

> School principals who believed good schools should teach the arts and that their students deserved them sought ways to fill the vacuum after the arts were cut. They found willing partners among arts organizations and teaching artists, the former concerned with the future of their audiences and the latter with finding ways to make a living in the world of the arts. (p. 131)

In response to the concerns that administrators have relied on teaching artists as cheap outsourced labor to replace full time arts specialists, the authors of the study suggested that three different partnerships should be formed: 1) an instructional partnership (or partnership between teaching artist and host teacher), 2) an institutional partnership (or partnership between arts organization and educational institution), and 3) a systemic partnership (or partnership that involves multiple actors, organizations, and stakeholders in overlapping communities).

The more I read about partnerships, the more I realized the need to shift the direction of my work. I started going to Last Chance as a young grad student in hopes of finding a convenient research site for my dissertation. But the more I read about poetry and intergenerational relationships, I began to see that I needed to finish my time on the team, then do my own thing.

"Will You Tell Me If It's Good?"

I kept my head down in the remaining months. I wrote quietly in the corner in the classroom, and on days when no students showed up, I sat and finished readings for class at the university. At conferences I stood meekly to the side and waited for my moment to speak. I even got to read a poem at the podium every once in a while. When six months were up, I told the team that I was focusing on another research project. I needed to tell a different type of story.

The following year, I learned that Sally's class was submitting verses for a rap contest about current events. It was the perfect time to return to the class in a more active role. In my subsequent visits to Last Chance, I hoped to draw on personal experience to vocalize the uncertainty that poets and educators face in times of program cuts and budget scares. I could name the challenges that teaching artists face because I have faced them. As a graduate student, living with no car on a shoestring budget, I believe that vocalizing how poverty affects my work can help readers visualize the struggles many young professionals face in this age. Although my story is my own, it can help to color the public dialogue on the fight to prioritize literacy and humanities education in the global education community.

I arrived in Sally's room smiling and feeling fresh, and I recited some of my more hip-hoppish, tongue-twisting poems for the class.

> I am that reckless fool
> bumping old-school tunes
> in stopped traffic.
> That inconsiderate idiot
> drummin' his digits
> on the dashboard,
> shaking the car
> with an air guitar,
> singing along
> in the wrong key
> so loudly
> the windows shatter
> and scatter glass

in the back seat.

I saw some familiar faces, but most of the students I had never met before. We debated about who the best emcees were in the game right now, and I wrote lyrics on the board to help students see which syllables are stressed or unstressed. I played a metronome app on my phone to show the class how to place stressed syllables on the downbeats. Students pulled me aside and ask if they can share their verses with me.

"Will you read what I wrote?" a student asked.

"Will you tell me if it's good?"

I nodded along to the beat, listening, and then showed them how to fit their words within the meter. They scratched out lines, realizing that being a rapper is harder than most think it is. As they revised their verses they talked and told me stories. And I talked back.

New Spiel, Old Spiel

In which the poet: uses poetry as a reflexive tool for self-critique; synthesizes historical research to explore the evolution of slam and its impact on education; and provides an autoethnographic account of Slam Camp, where some teenage students taught him an important lesson.

When you get to the top of the mountain
Pull the next one up.
Then there'll be two of you
Roped together at the waist
Tired and proud, knowing the mountain,
Knowing the human force it took
To bring both of you there.
—Marc Kelley Smith

The day that high school students took over my summer academy, I was arguably feeling a little defensive. Amidst the unfolding teen insurrection, a couple adult educators had arrived at the university to observe the morning lecture on "poetry and civic engagement." I had to politely tell them it was not a good time for visitors, neglecting to mention that all the students of color attending the academic camp had quit in protest and were now inhabiting the lecture hall.

It was not a good look. The counseling staff and I waited with nearly 70 white students in the atrium, while their peers deliberated inside. I reminded one of the two counselors allowed in the lecture hall that the cafeteria staff was expecting us soon, but my concerns weren't the priority at the moment. Everyone seemed generally angry with me.

When we were finally invited back into the room, all the students and staff filed into rows without a word. The phrase "Occupy Slam Camp" was scrawled on the dry erase board in black script. Roughly a dozen Black, Latina, and Asian high school students stood in the front of the room with their arms folded. As I was directed to my seat—in the audience—I wondered which character from *Lord of the Flies* I emulated most. After judging some of the glares in the room, I realized the answer was probably the staked pig head.

Over the course of the next thirty minutes, I sat quietly as the minority students attending the summer academy where I served as director told me that my actions were racist and that I

was fostering a toxic environment for young people of color. Some students said they wanted me to apologize. Others said that my apology would be an insult. I remember feeling very tired. I was sleep deprived and probably not making the best judgment calls. Thankfully I was too drained to be temperamental. White students in the audience watched silently as their peers listed grievances about microaggressions they had experienced while attending the camp. I noticed that some white students had fixed their gaze toward the front of the room, while others were fixated on watching me watch the front of the room. I felt frustrated and ashamed. Students in the front of the room "passed the mic" to one another, giving each person a chance to speak in a space where they claimed they felt silenced. One of the Black counselors squeezed my hand as she passed by and said, "I know this is hard." Then she walked away without any further comment or offering of unearned encouragement.

June 24th, 2016 remains the most humbling day I have ever experienced as an educator. A common adage in the profession states that teachers make 1500 decisions a day (Goldberg & Houser, 2017), and while I have grown accustomed to consistently making mistakes in my daily interactions with young people, there are still days of head-hanging shame that all teachers experience. The entire week seemingly went well, but on the last day of classes a lecture I had given a dozen times before went south. I'll break the lesson down in a moment, but long story short: I am a professional wordsmith who should have been more careful with his words, and as a result, I hurt the feelings of young poets who were hoping to find dignity in the institution I helped build.

The day my students "checked me" for being a problematic white person, I had to take in that moment and then almost immediately set it aside. I still had a camp to run! Moments after the session, I walked a handful of students to another building on campus to pay their remaining tuition while talking on the phone with the Business Affairs Office to make sure the staff got

their paychecks before the next billing cycle. From there I had to make sure students got home safely. Rooms had to be cleaned, keys had to be turned in, and lo—that is how "being busy" can bury an opportunity to think deeply about the day your students called you racist.

Ibram X Kendi (2019) said it is not enough for educators to be "non-racist," because historically, neutrality has been "a mask for racism" (p. 9). Instead, he argued that we must commit ourselves to being "anti-racist," which he described as a process of actions and interrogations one must make to rid the world of racist policies and practices. If a gatekeeper such as myself wishes to become an anti-racist, then it is vital that I attempt to foster an "antiracist space" (Kendi, 2019). While I may not be able to provide an unassailable "safe space" (Arao & Clemens, 2013) to all students at Slam Camp, I should have done better in providing all students a space where stakeholders involved work actively to combat racism. Kendi (2019) described "space antiracism" as "a powerful collection of antiracist policies that lead to racial equity between integrated and protected racialized spaces, which are substantiated by antiracist ideas about racialized spaces" (p. 166). While I may be able to hang my hat on the 1499 other decisions I made that day, I made one terrible decision. Despite my intentions, I decided to foster a racist space—a space where students of color felt marginalized by myself and other white actors.

Guilt and my generally anxious disposition have encouraged me to revisit the moment on a consistent basis, though an incident less than a year later encouraged me to think more critically about the student-led intervention. On April 15, 2017, the College Unions Poetry Slam Invitational (CUPSI) was wrapping up in Chicago, Illinois. Since the tournament was hosted in the birthplace of poetry slam, organizers of CUPSI asked founder Marc Smith to perform a set of poems before the final round of the international tournament, in front of hundreds of undergraduate students and mentoring teaching artists from around the world. Though there are

some similarities between the "CUPSI incident" and my bad day at Slam Camp, the protest interrupting his incendiary performance was a much more public blowup. Several young poets in the audience felt that Smith's message was condescending and stormed out of the auditorium. As Smith persisted and moved to the third poem in his set, a number of young poets reentered the auditorium in unison. Journalist Vangmayi Parakala (2019) described the scene vividly, which several young poets recorded on their phones and posted to social media:

> As he recited, a line of poets started forming a human chain at the foot of the stage. With their backs to Smith, they protested by crossing their arms in an X over their chests as he spoke about how those in "the third world" had real problems, while in "our comfortable homes," we are "milking the repression of our easy existence, stirring . . . our still free voices into teacup whirlpools of angst and despair."

As someone who has competed and organized in the slam circuit for over fifteen years, it was hard to watch the scene unfold on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. I grew up revering Marc. He's been a guest in my home. Once my car was towed while I was the feature artist at The Green Mill, and he gave me extra money to remove my vehicle from impound. Many other veterans, who did not attend CUPSI, swarmed social media in an attempt to defend Smith from the young poets posting their own reactions to the scene online. Suddenly, a public disagreement between one man and an auditorium full of young artists turned into an intergenerational "flame war" across the world wide web.

It is hard not to compare the CUPSI incident to the time I was taken to task at Slam Camp. Poetry slam has been characterized as a "youth-led" movement for as long as I can remember (Clay, 2006), but now that the kids had turned their critique toward our "founder" it was like the grownups were saying, "well, not like *that*!" As I watched veteran poets I admire admonish teenage poets online, including some of my students, I asked myself dozens of questions: How did we get to here? Was Smith's call-out in the same league as my own? What should stakeholders of influence learn from this? What parts of my own practice as a white, male

organizer and educator should I interrogate? What do the generations of artists owe one another entrenched in this intergenerational dialogue? Where do we go from here?

This chapter serves two purposes: first, I will provide a brief history of the poetry slam movement in order to characterize the generations of artists and contextualize the shift of agency between elders and youth. An important concept to consider is how poetry has historically been used as a tool for disruption. Second, with the guidance of my students and colleagues, I plan to delve deeper into my own "Slam Camp incident," in an attempt to audit my own best practices as an antiracist educator. In wake of the "CUPSI incident," I believe that revisiting this moment is important for me as an educator, not because I wish to justify myself or dismiss the criticisms that were directed with me. Rather, my hope is to "think aloud" (Davey, 1983) my own process of self-reflexivity, to encourage other elder teaching artists like myself to allow their students to steer their own self-interrogations as well. My aim here is to be self-critical, and not self-defensive or self-deprecating. In more poetic terms: this is me, "baring it all," on stage.

First Wave, Second Wave, Third Wave, Fourth Wave

I opened our hotel room door and as soon as I stepped out onto the balcony, a waft of the unmistakable smell of cannabis uppercut my nostrils. And I'm not talking about the ditchweed my high school friends in Southern Indiana sold that smells like an old jacket left in the back of a Pontiac Grand Am. No: this was gut-punch bud. This smelled like skunk butt and throw up. I looked to the right of me to see one of the California teams leaning on the rail; a guy with wrapped locks saluted me with a blunt smoldering between his fingertips.

When I looked over the rail I did an honest-to-god doubletake. We're talking Tom & Jerry— there may be a laugh track at the sound of your neck snap—type of take. Below us in the open-air plaza of the Hotel Blue, three people were skinny dipping in the public pool. It was not even 3 pm yet, and there were still two more days of the festival to go. I looked to the left of the

skinny dippers and saw poets sleeping on pool chairs next to knocked over liquor bottles. Behind them on the grass lawn, two poets were having an honest-to-god naked foot race, sprinting toward the finish line and reaching to slap the hands of the security guard. Yes, the security guard's palms were the finish line. Then all of the sudden a convertible pulled up out front, and the driver started selling burritos out the back of his popped trunk. This was only my second ever out-of-state poetry slam: I was a 22-year-old novice competitor at the National Poetry Slam in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and was overwhelmed by this portal that I just stumbled through.

Looking back, the culture of the poetry slam world in 2005 was far wilder and hedonistic than today. The battle cry to randomly shout in bouts that week was "spring break," created by some of the veteran poets further removed from school than I was. Though our behavior seems hard to justify to our socially-evolved progeny today, the debauchery at the time seemed revolutionary to a young performer stepping out of the stuffy academic worlds of theatre, speech, and debate. Grant (McAllister et al., 2008) wrote of the historic tournament: "What was happening in those Albuquerque nooks, unseen to most, was profound. These kids were designing their own rules of engagement with the world around them without permission or approval from an older generation afraid of its own creative shadow and paralyzed by disappointment" (p. 186). Albuquerque was the highest attended festival in the thirty year history of the National Poetry Slam (NPS), and this adult "spring break" was an entry point for a whole new generation of artists who had grown up watching "poetry slam" on MTV and HBO.

Poets at the tournament handled politics and play with the same intemperate attitude. A public protest occurred the night of finals, with some similarities to the CUPSI protest that would occur 12 years later. Organizers claim that an unprecedented 20,000 audience members attended the four day festival (McAllister et al, 2008) and when the Albuquerque team made the final round, thousands of New Mexico citizens packed the KIVA auditorium to cheer on the local

squad. Competitors from the Charlotte and Hollywood teams claimed that some audience members were booing them during their performance. According to the organizers of the event:

> The performances were stellar from all the teams, and the competition stayed tied through the final round. When the winner was declared and Albuquerque went to claim their trophy, two of the teams stood with arms crossed into Xs, while Queen Sheba of Charlotte acted as spokesperson to express the teams' distress.

Several members of the demonstration were temporarily banned from all Poetry Slam, Inc. events, and Albuquerque would never bid to host another NPS. While the lotus-eating lifestyle I stumbled into in 2005 has subsided over the years, the two "x-armed" protests suggested that collective action and defiance have long been components of slam culture. While social disruption is arguably a longstanding quality of spoken word poetry, it is interesting to consider how these protests suggested the shifting values and attitudes of artists over time. These skirmishes serve as reminders of the need to disrupt the telling of "standard stories" (Pfaff, 2018), including the mythicized origin story of poetry slam itself.

At the beginning of every bout at NPS, it is tradition that the host reads *the emcee spiel*: a prewritten speech that details the historical notes, rules, and guidelines for a slam competition. The spiel functions as both a primer for uninformed audiences and as a set of precepts for those ingrained into the community (Somers-Willet, 2009). The spiel also tells the tale of Marc Smith, a construction worker from Chicago who took up the pen in his early fifties. The standard narrative goes that Smith felt disconnected from elitist literary circles, so one day he crafted a new form of a poetry open mic with a populist twist: each poet would be judged by members of the audience, who were empowered to applaud, cheer, or even boo competitors (Aptowicz, 2008). The impact of Smith's creation, however, is not covered in the spiel: although slam was created in an anti-academic "sport" in an Uptown pub, this method of expression exploded into mainstream popularity in the mid-nineties (Somers-Willett, 2007). Poetry slam has traversed

beyond the bar and coffee shop scene, and is now a pedagogic practice embraced by numerous educational institutions around the world (McDaniel, 2000).

Since the CUPSI incident, many venue organizers around the world have decided to remove mentions of Marc Smith from their spiel. One exhumed criticism in the CUPSI debate is that the Chicago construction worker narrative works to erase the contributions of artists of color (Bauridl, 2010; Parakala, 2019). Others argue that Smith is an irreplaceable fixture in the legacy of slam. In this section, I complicate slam's "origin story," focusing instead on the artists and architects who have shaped the movement over the last four decades. I paid particular attention to the generational shifts in the poetry slam movement to gain a better understanding of how the artistry and the attitudes behind it have changed over time. To embolden my analysis, I built upon the ethnographic work of three poets from the slam community: Cristen O'Keefe Aptowicz, Scott Woods, and Javon Johnson. While my attempt here is to provide an agreeable timeline for the poetry slam movement, I can assert that my telling of history is also problematic. As Albuquerque organizer Becky Holtzman (McAllister et al., 2008) says, "Slam takes up space, and it doesn't usually close into the pages of a book" (p. 277).

Cristen O'Keefe Aptowicz' ambitious work *Words in Your Face* serves as a historical and ethnographic account of the first twenty years that poetry slam had an established presence in New York City. In detailing the changing attitudes and conventions of slam's history, Aptowicz (2008) established time periods that she called the "Three Waves" of slam. She explained:

> I believe there have been very distinct periods or movements—time when the attention paid to the slam surged or waned, when certain styles of poetry were favored or discouraged, when certain factions within the communities got along or were at one another's throats—and in this book I have defined these periods as the First, Second, and Third Waves of the New York City Slam Movement. (p. 61)

Aptowicz claimed these waves were established to solely represent the periods within New York City, and not the global poetry slam circuit. However, this move welcomes critique

because before the age of digital distribution, the work of New York City era poets often overshadowed the work being done by slammers all over the United States. For example, in Abbott's (2008) ethnography of the Southern Fried Poetry Slam, several of the poets interviewed attested that venues in the South did not get the same attention as The Nuyorican, for example, because of New York's role as a producer of content on television, radio, and film. As such, when people outside the slam community refer to a "slam poet" in the first twenty years of slam's history, they often reference New York-based poets such as Saul Williams, Beau Sia, and Maggie Estep, because the public's access to this artform was primarily through television and film. That being said, Aptowicz's waves serve as an initial foundation for chronicling the history of the practice of slam, which is important for my purposes because it helps explain how a speakeasy parlor game became a global educational movement.

So, what is the commonly told origin story of poetry slam? In the mid-80s Smith was hosting a vaudevillian poetry show at a "tiny and terminally funky neighborhood bar" called The Get Me High Lounge (Kart, 1986). When one of his acts ran short one night in 1986, Smith devised an impromptu poetry competition where the audience would serve as judges—cheering for the poems they love and boo the poems they don't. Chicago poet Dan Sullivan explained that the judicature component of slam was initially devised as a gimmick to energize the audience and make them the stars of the show—not the poets. The spontaneous event was so popular that Smith turned it into a regular show. The event took place in Uptown, near Wrigleyville, so Smith and his friends borrowed terminology from baseball to host their "grand slam" (Aptowicz, 2008). Over time, rules were standardized: the applause metric was replaced with scorecards, and judges were asked to provide poems with an "Olympic-style" score ranging from 0 to 10. Eventually the audience outgrew the closet-sized jazz club, and the Uptown slam soon moved to

the historic Green Mill, a former haunt of Chicago gangster Al Capone. The first prize for winning the Sunday evening slam was often a Twinkie (Parakala, 2019).

A construction worker gets back at academic tightwads by creating a global literary movement in the speakeasies of jazz legends and mobsters? It is a convenient mythos, easily memorable and self-contained within a single sentence. However, it is initially important that we problematize the construction worker narrative of slam to better understand why a professed architect of a 40 year movement could be run out of poetry town on a proverbial rail in 2017. First, while Smith designed the basic format used in most poetry slam competitions today, it is important to distinguish that formal poetry competitions have long served as a heralded tradition in numerous cultures around the world, with notable examples occurring on every continent across the span of thousands of years. Hirsch explains that historically, "the poetic contest is a way of asserting, establishing, and proving selfhood" (p. 466), and points to Ong's claim that "In pre-romantic, rhetorical culture, the poet is essentially a contestant" (p. 467). Critics have argued that the construction worker narrative particularly erases afro-diasporic verbal sparring traditions such as "toasting," "playing the dozens," and "battling" as it is known in hip hop culture (Price-Styles, 2015). This origin story of slam is much more complex in its telling.

Another reason to challenge the construction worker narrative is because while Smith built slam as a practice, it was a diverse arts community that built slam into a global literary movement over time. Aptowicz calls the years before 1990 the Pre-Wave era, arguing that in the 1980s there was no homogenous slam culture that we might think of today. When I meet people who don't know a lot about slam, one of the first things they ask me is if the performances are prepared or "freestyled," which to me speaks to the cultural undercurrent that links spoken word to hip hop. However, descriptions of slam in its initial years sound much less like a rap battle or cypher, and much more like something you'd see at a vaudeville show in an old-style saloon. A

1988 article in the *New York Times* depicts the slam at the Green Mill in Chicago as a gathering of blue collar workers, and not professional artists: a waitress, a liquor store owner, a former boxer, and a military veteran all share their work. And while most successful contemporary poets supplement their income, the important distinction is that the markers of their identity are found in their roles in the work force and not as an established artist who contributes labor toward that established network for artists.

As the lore goes, the *Times* article caught the eye of a New York-based poet named Bob Holman, who became passionately invested in bringing a slam to Manhattan. The first poetry slam in the Bowery District happened on August 20, 1988, after a masterful effort to fix the leaky roof of the historic Nuyorican Poet's Café (Aptowicz, 2008). By 1991, poetry slam had a presence in Ann Arbor, Michigan, San Francisco, California, and Boston, Massachusetts, with venues beginning to appear in Southeastern states in 1992 (Abbott, 2008). Allan Wolf, poet and pioneering organizer from Asheville, North Carolina, informed me that there was no money at stake or career to build upon in these early days. Poetry slams belonged in niche bars and coffee shops; not schools or literary journals (Aptowicz, 2008).

According to Aptowicz, the First Wave of the poetry slam took place between 1990 and 1996. Again, though her timeline is specific to New York, it is applicable to this global timeline because the practice had not yet been adopted internationally, and mostly existed as an informal parlor game in working class venues scattered across the United States. Describing the characteristics of the First Wave in New York, Aptowicz explained:

> At the time, the poetry slam was an unknown and untested arts experience, the latest attempt by uber-organizer Holman to bring poetry to the mainstream. No one knew—not the poets, the audience, the media, even Holman—whether the poetry slam would prove to be a gimmick destined to last only a few seasons before fading into obscurity; whether the audience or poets would dry up; or whether the media attention would popularize slam or just alienate it from the community it had hoped to showcase.

By 1990, however, it seems that the experiment of slam was yielding positive outcomes for artists participating in competitions—at least in New York. Aptowicz claimed that the Nuyorican slam started getting more attention when critically praised poets began attending such as Paul Beatty, who would eventually teach at Columbia University and win the National Book Critics Circle Award. While artists during the Pre-Wave era saw slam as something to do in a bar during late night, Beatty's history with the Nuyorican shows how artists in the 90s began to see slam as a launching pad to more important creative endeavors. Beatty won the first New York City grand slam in 1990, and as a prize the Nuyorican Poets Café Press published his first book of poetry and sent him to San Francisco to compete at the first ever National Poetry Slam. The book was considered a "critical darling" to many and the tour helped him connect with a fledgling network of poets from around the country. During this era, slam became a commodity, with a bigger prize to win than a Twinkie.

Slam was just a pit stop for artists at the time, which also explains why very few people took slam seriously as a vehicle for youth literacies and critical pedagogy in the first fifteen years. Unfortunately, much of the work created before the Second Wave has been lost, save for works published in early anthologies like *Aloud: Live from the Nuyorican Poet's Café* and *The American Bible of Outlaw Poetry*. There was also no unified standard for slam yet, both as a competition and vehicle for artistic expression, as much of the performances were experimental and not as rigorously revised and polished as they are today. Scott Woods (2019), poet and former President of PSI, Inc called these early years of poetry slam "The Original Era," because there was no set of best practices to follow if you wanted to "succeed" in slam.

Although Aptowicz's justification for situating the start of the Second Wave is very New York-oriented, her timeline again fits with a global timeline, because this era is popularized by the first appearance of what Marc Smith has sneeringly referred to as "rock stars" (Aptowicz,

2007). Aptowicz explains, "To me, the Second Wave of the New York City poetry slam began the first time Beau Sia, a nineteen-year-old Chinese-American wunderkind, strode across the Nuyorican Stage" (p. 134). Sia later slammed with the infamous Nuyorican team that placed second at the 1994 NPS. Captured in Paul Devlin's film *SlamNation*, the team included Saul Williams, Jessica Care Moore, and muMz da Schemer, all of whom would become crossover superstars in the realms of hip hop, theatre, and film. Beau Sia would later be an original cast member of HBO's series Def Poetry, and would star in multiple films, music videos, and Broadway. Scott Woods (2019) called this the Golden Era of slam, because several notable participants became breakout stars in popular media.

And while this justification sounds super specified toward a New York context, I believe there are several reasons to view Sia's rise as a way to mark the beginning of the global Second Wave. In general, it is arguably fair to single out Sia because slam exploded into mainstream popularity in the mid-90s, due in large part to New York media and art that involved him, such as the 1998 Sundance Grand Jury winning film *Slam*, and his parody book of singer/songwriter Jewel titled *A Night Without Armor II—the Revenge*, which was published by New York record label Mouth Almighty and could be found in corporate book stores such as Barnes & Noble and Borders. On a more personal level, I tend to agree with Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz because Beau Sia is who I wanted to be when I grew up, which was an identity very much situated as "slam poet." Most poets didn't take slam seriously, but Aptowicz claims that Beau Sia was a "new breed":

> Sia represented a new generation of slammers: poets who were completely aware of what the slam could do for them and were unabashedly determined to see where slam could take them. For First Wave poets, the poetry slam was an experience, a way to get attention and garner an audience before moving on to accomplish their real goals as writers. For the Second Wavers, the poetry slam wasn't an experience; the poetry slam was *the* experience [emphasis mine] (p. 135).

This is an important distinction to make for spoken word pedagogues because the Second Wave is essentially when the artform developed into a youth literacy (Morrell, 2002). Beau Sia was on my TV: he was a writer who was actually cool, and I wanted to be just like him when I was a teenager. The emerging celebrity of slam demonstrated that the movement had finally spawned into a homogenous culture with icons to emulate, and as a young performer I watched videos of Sia over and over, trying to capture his dynamism on the stage. It is also important from a youth literacies perspective to recognize that this is when poems popularized on the slam circuit became more readily available to consumers. I specifically remember collecting Beau Sia's work in energizing anthologies such as *Poetry Slam* and *The Spoken Word Revolution*. I downloaded his album *Attack Attack Go* on Napster, and listened to it on repeat on my clunky mp3 player when I was a teenager.

It is necessary to distinguish the difference between slam functioning as a youth literacy and as a youth pedagogy, because you'd be hard pressed to find the word "poetry slam" in any school lesson plan at the time. In 2000, critic Harold Bloom went as far to call slam "the death of art," which provides an idea of the value academics saw in slam. Poems from the Second Wave served as counternarratives to the poems found in traditional school curricula, that arguably promote Eurocentric, misogynistic perspectives like Harold Bloom (Gioia, 1991). Though hearing a "spoken word" poem in a school was rare, save the occasional drama club or speech and debate office, we as teenage fans finally had celebrity poets we could read more about at home. I remember the first time I saw Beau Sia across a room at NPS in Albuquerque, with a jet-black mohawk and designer jeans. I was starstruck in a way that a young reader would be if they had the chance to meet Harry Potter himself.

So far Aptowicz' NYC timeline has agreed with my global timeline, but it is during the Second Wave that our benchmarks begin to diverge. Her main justification for separating a Second to Third Wave is situated specifically in New York City. She writes:

> New York would never be the same after September 11, 2001, but an act that was intended to destroy confidence and hope instead brought the people of New York City closer together. This felt especially true in the New York City poetry slam community, where the years of bitter feuding instantly lost meaning and power in the wake of such tragedy. (Aptowicz, 2008, p. 160)

By the Fall of 2001, the New York scene had grown into splintered factions of artists with competing goals and principles, so it makes sense that a calamity the scope of 9/11 would bring a new dawn in the local community. And while the whole country was rocked by the impact of the attack, the global literary scene didn't experience a shifting of conventions or turnover of artists the same way other Wave benchmarks did. While Aptowicz' Second Wave ended in 2001, my proposed altered timeline would place the global Second Wave between 1996 and 2005, which I support with several arguments. First, mere months after 9/11 the television show Def Poetry premiered on HBO, which showcased many of the aforementioned Second Wave poets as the names to know in the slam community. The television show, produced by New York hip hop mogul Russell Simmons, primarily showcased New York poets such as Beau Sia, Saul Williams and muMs da Schemer. While a new Wave of poets were beginning to dominate the national and regional slams, such as Buddy Wakefield, Andrea Gibson, Anis Mojgani, Mike McGee, Rachel McKibbens, Jamaal "Versiz" May, Shane Koyczan, and Sonya Renee Taylor, these artists would not become as well-known to lay audiences as the stars of the first season of Def Poetry, until a few years later when digital distribution on the internet became more widely used by poetry fans.

Second, the preferred medium for poetry merchandise (or "merch") is a reason why the beginning of the Third Wave arguably starts later than 2001. While Def Poetry may have been the most vital program in making poetry slam a household name, the distribution methods of

television, film, and live performances at music festivals are more in line with the primary avenues of artists of the Second Wave. However, two growing infrastructures were starting to solidify in the years following the release of HBO's show: the invention of open-source file sharing, and the creation of independent presses that were welcoming to artists from the slam community. While file-sharing services such as Napster, LimeWire, and Gnutella were initially released around the time of Def Poetry, they didn't achieve widespread use until a few years later. Additionally, two important internet inventions were released in 2005 that would forever change the course of the slam community: Facebook and YouTube. Suddenly, poets had an open access forum to share their work with fans, and also network with other artists from other cities and countries. Other digital methods created possibilities around the same time, such as the podcast IndieFeed and Buddy Wakefield's Bullhorn Collective, which showcased audio and video of the poetry written by artists employed by his talent agency.

And while many educators are inclined to share poems with their classroom via video or audio (Miller & Borowicz, 2007), many slammers also value publishing their work in print. Although the work of slammers is now regularly published in mainstream literary journals like Poetry Magazine and Ploughshares, these avenues weren't as available during the first two Waves: many editors didn't want to publish the work of slammers, and many slammers didn't care to publish their work in journals. This changed around 2005, when some artists began opening their own small independent presses that catered specifically to the work of spoken word artists. Perhaps the most successful press to emerge during the Third Wave is Write Bloody, started by former slam competitor Derrick Brown. According to a personal conversation I had with Buddy Wakefield, Brown was inspired to create a small press when he realized his friends who were successfully touring Universities and making a living were still making their chapbooks by hand at local printer shops like Kinko's and Staples. The press would eventually

publish the work of a number of Third Wave Artists such as Tara Hardy, Laura Yes Yes, Jon Sands, Jeanann Verlee, Jason Bayoni, Sierra DeMulder, and Lauren Zuniga.

For the reasons stated above, I believe that the Third Wave of the global poetry slam movement began in 2005. And while I believe that new artists with new methods of sharing their work with the world are important elements to consider, there is one more pivotal event that ushered in the Third Wave: The National Poetry Slam in Albuquerque, New Mexico. My earlier descriptions of "spring break" should not undercut the amplified power of the poetry showcased in Albuquerque. Poets on final stage directed their eruptive words at issues as varying as systemic racism, homophobia, rape culture, the school-to-prison pipeline, homelessness, and the prevailing stigma of suicide (McAllister et al., 2008). The content of the poetry has always been political (Teicher, 2017). However, it may be fair to say that there was a difference in the sense of personal accountability.

Every year a "Spirit of the Slam" award is given to someone at NPS to recognize their dedicated commitment to community, and in 2005 it was given to the manager at the tournament host hotel The Hotel Blue (McCallister et al., 2008). His hospitality was unparalleled, and his typical response to the antics unraveling in the hotel courtyard seemed to be whistling and walking away. Several weeks after the tournament, and we'd all returned to our respective corners of the world, we learned that he lost his job at the hotel. Rumors during the First and Second Waves were shared over back pats and beers, but in 2005 tittle-tattle was also shared by poets on Internet forums and instant message. Did he get fired because of our spring break shenanigans? Did our recklessness actually wreck this man's life? Although today he insists there were other reasons he and the hotel parted ways, at the time two narratives emerged on burgeoning social media: 1) he was probably fired, and 2) it was probably our fault.

The Third Wave was populated by the young artists who idolized Def Poetry as teenagers, and carried worn copies of anthologies like *Poetry Slam* and *The Spoken Word Revolution* in their backpacks. Scott Woods (2019) refers to this era as the Popular Era of slam.

Now that we were grown up and slamming in the same bars with our idols, we were learning there was a vast divide between being a rock star and a role model. We were also learning a harder lesson: some of the artists, whose work changed our lives, were kind of assholes. Some of the less successful poets were nicer, and seemed to garner respect for different reasons. And then some artists were just celestial—they were like sages, whose words and deeds seemed elevated in space, even though they were walking alongside you in the same bar. I imagine it was easier to be a complicated artist in the years precluding the invention of smartphones, before anyone had to worry about garnering "likes" and "follows" on social media. In the aftermath of Albuquerque, the Third Wave poets of the digital age were learning how to carry ourselves. Publicly.

An unexpected shift happened in the prefatory years of the Third Wave. I myself left the reckless abandon of NPS '05 and returned to my college town in Bowling Green, Kentucky. Inspired by work from scenes in metropolitan cities like Austin, Denver, and Washington, DC, teenage and twentysomething poets were now hosting their own shows in smaller cities and rural spaces. Between the Second and Third Wave, slam scenes started popping up in cities like Normal, Illinois, Durham, North Carolina, Worcester, Massachusetts, and Madison, Wisconsin. As teenagers we stretched our fingers toward the TV screens, wishing to know what the air must feel like in the cities we wished to visit one day. Now we were grown, and hellbent on bringing this seemingly deviant art to the pubs and coffee shops of our little farm towns. The end of the Second Wave and beginnings of the Third Wave saw the birth of something that poets colloquially call "The College Market." Whereas a poet might make 50 bucks at their local slam,

if they are lucky enough to win, suddenly departments and student organizations were paying artists thousands of dollars to perform on campus. Some successful artists began hiring agents, managers, and publicists to help them navigate this new world.

Then one day, a teacher friend asked me if I would be willing to visit her classroom of middle school students in Southern Indiana. I skeptically agreed, even though the idea made no sense to me. My poems were filled with curse words, dirty jokes, and obscure comic book references. Many of my poems were even highly critical of the American education system, and other institutions normally upheld in schools. Most importantly, I never wanted to be a teacher. Spoken word poetry was my way of rebelling against the boring poetry we read in school.

Regardless, I arrived at the school in my unbuttoned blazer and setlist of sanitized poems. Surprisingly, the teens in class were excited about poems too, and wrote their own in a guided workshop. I remember being struck with how the students used poetry to explore their rural identity, writing poems about pro wrestling, riding ATVs, and playing X-box with friends. I wasn't the only one discovering that spoken word can have a powerful impact in classrooms. Albuquerque organizer Don McIver (McAllister et al., 2008) explained that many artists in New Mexico had begun serving as instructors in secondary schools and universities, and in turn, the same artists participating in the National Poetry Slam used these classrooms as places for outreach. Poets would visit classrooms to perform and host creative writing workshops in the spring, in part, to peak interest for the festival happening in the summer. After the festival was over, many of these artists relinquished their organizer duties and returned to classrooms in a fervor, galvanized by the collective energy of non-school events like NPS. During the Third Wave, an almost symbiotic relationship began forming between poets and educators who were starting to use spoken word as a critical pedagogy (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). The slammers who learned to code-switch and adhere to school dress codes suddenly found ourselves

embracing a duel identity that our predecessors did not possess. We were artists. And we were teachers. We were teaching artists.

The Third Wave saw an explosion of youth organizations dedicated to hosting slam competitions for teens. While NPS and other grassroot adult festivals were barely breaking even financially, a number of startup nonprofit organizations such as YouthSpeaks, Louder Than a Bomb, Urban Word, and Get Lit-Words Ignite were growing into multimillion dollar institutions, with professionally constructed curricula appearing in thousands of schools around the world. I used to be one of countless teens who grew up loving the gritty content of poems in the Second Wave, and now a generation later, there was an entire industry marketing "engaging" content towards youth. Though slam was always thought to be a youthful movement—a fresh rejection of the old fogies peddling New Criticism in the academy—suddenly, slam was a bonafide youth movement. This is how the value system of the culture can shift from deferring to whatever the "old heads" say to focusing on youth critique as a driving force for pedagogy.

Just like the Wave precluding it, the Third Wave ended in 2013 with a protest at the finals of the National Poetry Slam, which was held in Boston that year. Somewhat ironically, the best account of the protest is told by Javon Johnson, who was one of the artists on stage in Albuquerque holding their arms in an X. Before the summer of 2013 the spoken word community had its own erupting #MeToo movement, years before the highly publicized controversies that took place in the artistic worlds of stand-up comedy, film, and music. In his book *Killing Poetry*, Johnson (2017) explains that the finals auditorium erupted in hisses and boos when a team took the stage during the pre-competition showcase, featuring a member accused of raping another poet. Johnson's book details the incident, and the ensuing conversations that took place at NPS. What Johnson's book doesn't discuss is the ensuing backchannel conversations that members of the community had on social media after the event.

A number of women in the community created a private group to discuss issues of sexual assault, colloquially known as "The Mama Bears Group."

Though I was not privy to a lot of the conversations that took place there, allegedly women in the group differed in opinion on what steps to take. Some made a "ban list" of men (and a few women) who were rumored to be sexual predators, and advocated for publicly "calling out" stakeholders who seemed complicit with rape culture. Others advocated for a "call in" culture, and adopting a restorative justice model where survivors could seek restitution by confronting their perpetrator. Some members were even accused of leaking screenshots and sharing them with men mentioned in the group. Regardless of stance, the community as a collective agreed upon one thing: we failed in our promise to provide everyone a "safe space," and should instead focus on providing a "brave space" (Arao & Clemens 2013), where stakeholders actively work toward ridding the shared space of sexual violence and misogyny. Sadly, a number of artists from the Third Wave left the larger community, feeling either disenfranchised, in danger, or just sick of the infighting on all the digital walls.

Something else happened in 2013 that suggests a shift. On July 22nd, an organization called Button Poetry posted a video of Neil Hilborn's performance of his poem "OCD," recorded at the 2013 Rustbelt regional poetry slam in Madison, Wisconsin. Achieving viral attention on social media sites like reddit and Tumblr, the video eventually racked up over 15 million views, making Hilborn the most viewed poet on YouTube (Happold, 2018). The beginning of the Fourth Wave saw the rise of digital distribution, where organizations like Button Poetry, Write About Now, and SlamFind would publish videos receiving millions of views. Suddenly artists were featured on digital platforms such as TED and Snap Judgement, and their content was shared on new social media sites such as Instagram and FaceTime. While spoken word has always been a

multimodal literary form, now any person with an internet connection could stream endless poetry content at home on their computer.

And while a number of fledgling artists graduating from the youth poetry scene found viral fame and literary stature, the popularity of a poem in the Fourth Wave may also be determined by the poem's content. The subjects of Button's most popular poems showcase issues that directly impact teens, such as depression, eating disorders, bullying, and substance abuse in the home (Johnson, 2017). In an educational context, the focus of spoken word pedagogy became less about learning technical skills and literary devices, and more about using poetry as a vehicle for exploring identity (Somers-Willett, 2009). In 2013, I hosted the first Slam Camp, along with poets Sierra DeMulder and Cuban Hernandez, whose faculty would include numerous Third and Fourth Wave artists such as Rudy Francisco, Neil Hilborn, Giddy Perez, Hieu Minh Nguyen, Olivia Gatwood, Melissa Lozada-Oliva, Ashlee Haze, G Yamazawa, Donte Collins, Heather "Hero" Wells, and graduate notable artists such as Blythe Baird, Jamal Parker, and Miss K. It was during the Fourth Wave my students pulled my card. I thought my knowledge of things entitled me to speak for everyone, and in the summer of 2016 I learned I was wrong. Less than a year later, the proverbial founder of the poetry slam movement would receive a similar reckoning.

Considering the gravity of the CUPSI incident in 2017, Parakala writes: "It must have been surreal for Marc Smith—the man who believes that the show is everything, the audience is king, and 'the greatest thing for a young artist is to be booed.'" Though many people encouraged Smith to apologize, he never did. Smith's refusal to address the incident with humility was disappointing to me, because it stood at odds with the social contract of the emcee spiel. Upon hearing the name Marc Smith during the construction worker narrative, familiar audiences traditionally shout, "So what!" at the stage. This tongue-in-cheek practice was even promoted by

the man himself at the historic slam at The Green Mill Lounge (Aptowicz, 2008). The call-and-response practice presents the history of slam as a dueling set of counternarratives: a sanctioned voice establishes that it is important for the audience to know about Smith, a socialist working class artist from Uptown Chicago, and an unsanctioned voice questions why the audience should give a proverbial shit. The move reinforces the foundational idea of slam that aims to privilege the experiences of the audience over any of the performers on stage.

Erasure as Confrontation

There is a writing activity we practice at Slam Camp called erasure. According to the Academy of American Poets (2020): "Erasure poetry, also known as blackout poetry, is a form of found poetry wherein a poet takes an existing text and erases, blacks out, or otherwise obscures a large portion of the text, creating a wholly new work from what remains" (p. 1). The entry goes on to explain that erasure is often used as a means of confrontation, "a challenge to a pre-existing text" (p. 2). For example, in 2017 a White House aid named Stephen Miller dismissed Emma Lazarus' poem "The New Colossus" while unveiling a racist immigration policy in a press briefing. In response, editors from the Guardian asked 21 poets to write a poem they think Trump would like to see at the base of the Statue of Liberty. Fourth Wave poet Hanif Abdurraqib created an erasure poem entitled "~~Lazarus.~~"

Give me	your poor
huddled masses	yearning to breathe
The wretched	refuse of
home,	tempest
beside the	golden door

Literary critic Parul Sehgal (2016) offered a separate definition of erasure that seems relevant to consider, saying it "refers to the practice of collective indifference that renders certain people and groups invisible" (p. 3). Sehgal conceptualized erasure as the violence of dismissal, arguing that often the historical contributions of women and people of color are "blotted out" in

standard stories. In the final section of this chapter, I consider erasure in both its definitions by returning to the site of Slam Camp. The history of poetry slam impels stakeholders to consider the power of stories, and therefore, I believe that reflecting on my own acts of erasure is in line with Kendi's (2019) interrogative practice of anti-racism.

At Slam Camp, students often practiced the poetic art of erasure using text authored by dead writers. Erasure is political in nature because "there is a desire to re-examine the institutions and narratives that shape Americans' lives, from government bureaucracy to new media" (Stone, 2017, p. 4). There is a shift in power in the process of blotting out a canonical text, because erasure transforms an existing text into a dialogue between an elder and younger poet. Notably, it is often the younger poet who gets to reassign meaning. During one lesson, students took black Sharpie markers to pages of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, constructing their own new text through the destruction of an old one (King, 2012). Erasure impelled writers at Slam Camp to consider art as a form of disruption, and given its political nature we often facilitated the lesson the same day as my lecture on poetry and civic engagement.

I had given some variation of the lecture the previous three years of Slam Camp, and it was always one of the most popular discussions. So, what went wrong in the summer of 2016? How did a homerun lesson plan turn into an error? I think it is important to say I expressed hesitance about the lecture to my colleagues. I don't say this now to be dismissive or absolve myself, because my students felt silenced regardless. Rather, it is important to accurately reconsider my decision making processes as an educator so that we can reflect on both immediately evident mistakes, as well as mistakes that became apparent in hindsight.

One reason I felt I was not equipped for the lecture is because I was facing new administrative tasks as the director of Slam Camp. In four years, we grew from a humble size of seven students and three counselors to a large academy of eighty students and fifteen counselors,

meaning I had to spend a lot more time outside the classroom. That year we also moved from a small liberal arts college to a large Research 1 university and I had to take extra administrative duties in the transition. In short, my mind was distracted by insurance forms and purchase orders. Two errors are evident here. First, I was not in an appropriate mental state to foster a critical conversation on race and gender. Research shows that busyness can impede creative thinking (Smallwood & Schooler, 2015), which is troublesome because these critical processes are necessary components of arts based learning. Second, I hadn't put in the necessary time for relationship building in the classroom. This may be an obvious oversight to some educators, but remember that a lot of spoken word events function somewhat like explosive meet-and-greets: often a poet from a faraway place is brought into a learning space to publicly stage their perspectives in front of strangers. Obviously, that practice wasn't successful here. Building relationships is an important component to fostering culturally competent spaces (Egan-Robertson, 1998), and clearly I had not done the necessary work to build trust between myself and my students.

Another reason I was probably not the appropriate person to facilitate the lecture is because the growth of our academy meant the demographics of the audience had shifted. Though we worked to make Slam Camp as affordable as possible, the cost of travel and tuition was an investment for many families. A majority of our students were white teenage girls from upper-middle class families, and over the years we made efforts to improve the diversity of our student body by raising funds for scholarships and travel stipends. In 2016, we hosted students from thirty different states and succeeded in raising funds to provide scholarships for students from low income families. We increased the number of minority students at our academy, but in terms of actual representation, we still had a ratio where 4 out of 5 of our participants identified as white teen girls. This meant that despite our efforts, we were still fostering a conversation about

intersectionality in a racially homogenous space. According to Kendi (2019), “A space is racialized when a racial group is known to either govern the space or make up the clear majority of the space” (p. 169). Recognizing the optics of the situation, I invited another counselor to the front of the lecture hall to add to the conversation, and asked other counselors if they would chime in. However, in hindsight this move was a half measure. My body was still the body centered in the class. My voice was still the one directing the discourse.

Positioning my identity and stance as the vehicle for the lecture proved to be as problematic as I feared. This foresight suggests a number of ways a student might feel erased in this lesson. In addition to these optics, students highlighted two statements that I made. In order to appreciate the gravity of my words, I have conceptualized my phrases through the practice of erasure. I was attempting to foster a discussion on the relationship between power and whiteness. I am sure I am being kind to myself in my paraphrasing, but essentially I said:

> As a white organizer in a multicultural arts community, I have to be thoughtful of my own white privilege and how it affects my perspectives. Now, I have some friends in the poetry community who call me an honorary Black person, as a joke. And while feeling included makes me smile, I know that they aren’t being earnest. We may have equal standing on the stage, but I know as soon as I leave the poetry venue that I get all my privileges back. I can hail a cab, get a bank loan, and don’t have to fear police.

Ask any teacher, and they will tell you that students listen in both careful and careless ways. In my experience, my students might ignore what I am saying, but they rarely mishear me. Erasure can strip away the words that did not carry as much weight to my students.

> [redacted] I have some friends in the poetry community who call me an honorary black person [redacted]

A Black student left the lecture hall in a hurry, but in my mind I reasoned that maybe they had to go to the bathroom. I continued on, obtusely, attempting to comment on the white-

industrial savior complex (Cole, 2012), a tired trope some white poets use to "perform" their allyship in public. I had a book in my hand as if it granted me extra credibility.

> I am eerie of white performers who use a benevolent tone to tell stories about helping people of color. I think these stories undermine the efforts of organizers from minority communities. As a white person, I don't think it is my responsibility to help Black people. I think it is my responsibility to help white people build a less racist society, which will create a more equitable world for Black people and people of color.

I did not mean. I did not mean. I did not mean, no matter. My careless words made young wonderers feel invisible.

> [redacted] As a white person, I don't think it is my responsibility to help Black people. [redacted]

The lecture ended when a counselor informed the class that several students had congregated in the atrium. They wanted a platform to be heard. So they claimed the space of the lecture hall and wrote "Occupy Slam Camp" on the board.

After students took turns sharing the hurt I caused them, they gave me a turn to speak. I stood, and said I am sorry. I said their feelings were valid and that it didn't matter what my intentions were. I promised to learn from this and do better. I cried, and when other white students in the audience saw me cry, I guess they felt that allowed them to cry too.

Later that day, when the lecture hall was cleared, I found a note a student left in my copy of Gloria Anzuldua's *Borderlands/La Frontera* that I referenced in the lecture. The letter accused me of breaking my promise. That I promised a "safe space" for students, and then I snatched it away from them. The note said that I stole their voices.

I wrote this chapter to help artists and teachers rethink their stance as gatekeepers and curators of culture. I don't know what lessons Marc Smith has learned, or the owners of Button or Write Bloody, but my mistakes have made me reconsider the spaces around me and my sense

of belonging in them. Some students said my apology wasn't enough, and I did not disagree with them. I have apologies that are harder to offer.

To my students: I am sorry I thought big words could supersede your experiences. I am sorry I assumed the authority to tell stories that are not mine. I am sorry I did not share the stage. I am sorry for turning the culture into a collection of names and dates to learn in a class. I am sorry for being so stuck on the construction worker story. I am sorry this essay failed to decenter the white profiteers from the story of slam. I am sorry that I cannot say whether Marc's Smith's name should be struck from the spiel. I am sorry I don't know if we should erase his legacy or confront it. In saying sorry, I offer an erasure of my own.

When you get [redacted] the mountain
[redacted] the [redacted] one up [redacted]
Then [redacted]
[redacted] know [redacted]
[redacted] the human force it took
To bring [redacted] you [redacted] here.

Spring Song for Justine

In which the poet: pens an autoethnographic narrative, embedded with Frankenstein literature, to consider critical themes discussed at a summer literacy program at a women's prison.

To get to the chapel you must walk an uneven footpath, which winds past the greenhouse on a subsiding lane through the prison yard. I tried to maneuver the wheels of the cart on the rutted concrete, hoping my boxes of markers and construction paper wouldn't spill onto the grass and into the wind. *Blessed are the jailhouse art teachers*, I said to the staffer steering the dolly, thankful that my usual classroom supplies are just paper and pen. My poetry class was over for the semester, but I volunteered to facilitate a mixed media summer reading program. For the first session of this course we made craft Frankenstein monsters: some women ripped up photos in old magazines to assemble their own weird creatures, while others chose to make little green puppets with gnarled, goofy faces.

The sign-up sheet for the Frankenstein Community Reads program went up at the women's prison, and I hoped at least seven people would express interest in the two-week summer series. When I learned that over 100 women applied to participate in the course, I was floored. I was also left scrambling to collect enough magazines and craft supplies for the large class size. Every item has to be preapproved: popsicle sticks; googly eyes; glue sticks. I am often encouraged to use stick pens instead of retractable pens, because technically pens with springs can be hacked to create a makeshift weapon. When my box of 50 copies of Frankenstein passed through the metal detector—enough for the 50 students accepted into the course—a guard had to fan through every page to ensure I am not smuggling in contraband. I worry that by telling you this, you'll assume my students are monstrous, and not the facility which houses our classroom space.

There are plenty of things to fear in a prison, but fear can be a fickle creature when discussing a shared love of reading. My intent in introducing Frankenstein in this space was to

encourage participants to consider how Mary Shelley uses "the tremendous creature" as a metaphor for the ways a violent, neglectful society encourages violence and neglect in people. While representations in film and popular culture present the creature as a mindless, violent thug, Shelley's version of the creature was much different. Intelligent. Articulate. Lonely. Neglected. Misunderstood. Mistreated. Afraid. For example, an analysis written by Mary's husband, Percy Shelley, had this to say about the intent of the creature metaphor:

> Treat a person ill, and he will become wicked. Requite affection with scorn;—let one being be selected, for whatever cause, as the refuse of his kind—divide him, a social being, from society, and you impose upon him the irresistible obligations—malevolence and selfishness. It is thus that, too often in society, those who are best qualified to be its benefactors and its ornaments, are branded by some accident with scorn, and changed, by neglect and solitude of heart, into a scourge and a curse.

When Indiana Humanities asked me to write a guest blog about our summer literacy program in the detention facility, the same problem I often run into resurfaced: *how do you tell a story about a prison classroom?* I was not allowed to bring a camera inside to document the experience, and it is against the rules to share student work with the greater public. I was not allowed to describe participants in a way that points out identifying characteristics. In fact, I am never supposed to specify which facility I work with when I tell stories like these.

Beyond the rules, my biggest concern when I write about my students is that I will accidentally represent them as subhuman. This is why I often relied on small, subtle descriptions to document the little moments in our class. While there were a lot of details I can't share, I can tell you how elated I feel to see students smell the pages of their books when I pass them out. "I love that smell," one participant says. "It smells like," she holds the novel to her nose," new book!" The smell of a new book is one of the tiny loves many bibliophiles take for granted before they are incarcerated.

For the second of four sessions, I presented FrankenSlam: a hybrid lecture and poetry performance about Frankenstein mythos, spanning from Keats and Byron to contemporaries like

Margaret Atwood and Jericho Brown. During my set a woman raised her hand and asked how Victor can create something so passionately, and then immediately reject it and flee. I asked if she's never met a man who split when confronted with responsibility, which elicited laughter and applause from the group. This prompted a "call and response" that we would perform in subsequent classes. Any time we would speak of Victor's neglect, I'd say, "Remember, Victor Frankenstein is…" and the group would respond in unison, "Trash."

One area of focus in FrankenSlam explored the ways that Mary Shelley was a societal outcast. While we know her as an author of the highest literary merit today, in the 1800s she was a pregnant teenage runaway who fled her home to hang out with derelict artists with Romantic attitudes about sex and drugs. The Shelleys burned bridges by borrowing money from friends and spent their lives dodging creditors. At least two of Mary's children died due to their transient lifestyle and possible neglect, a crime for which some women in the class are facing life sentences. While the women I work with are often judged by the entirety of their crime, the Shelleys have seemingly been pardoned in the public eye over the course of the past 200 years.

For the third session, my friend Jamie Zipfel facilitated our book discussion—a challenge in any class of 50 students, let alone in the acoustically-unkind basement of a prison chapel. Jamie asked what themes are evident in the novel that they see in their own lives. Women highlighted themes like isolation; addiction; neglect; mental illness; racism and prejudice; bondage; making contracts with God. In the novel *Frankenstein* a woman named Justine is accused of a murder committed by the creature, and instead of rescuing her from the death penalty by confessing that he created the murderer, Victor silently allows her to be sentenced for his own crime. One of my students was flabbergasted by this. "How could he just let her take the rap for something like that?" she asked, shaking her head at the novel in her hand.

On the final day of our time together, we watched James Whale's masterpiece *The Bride of Frankenstein*. Some women in the class asked why we are watching the sequel instead of the first movie. I tell them it is the better film, and short enough to fit into our restricted class time. Secretly, I wanted to show them the redeemed version of the creature. In Whale's original film, the creature is a silent ogre, who stalks and murders humans with no regard. In *Bride*, the creature is redeemed in many ways. He meets a blind hermit in the woods, who teaches him how to speak and the difference between right and wrong. The scene of the creature discovering the man is described by poet Edward Field:

> He is pursued by the ignorant villagers,
> who think he is evil and dangerous because he is ugly
> and makes ugly noises.
> They wave firebrands at him and cudgels and rakes,
> but he escapes and comes to the thatched cottage
> of an old blind man playing on the violin Mendelssohn's "Spring Song."

The blind man confesses that he has prayed to God to send him a friend, and the two forlorn men gently embrace one another next to the fire. When the creature weeps at the man's kindness, the women audibly sighed and cheered at the screen. Kindness is a precious commodity in prison, and as a celebration for the end of the course, the prison administration left a box of Hot Takis and Cheetos for us to eat, and a cooler of ice-cold Coca-Cola. Though I had only been incarcerated as a guest for a couple of hours on this day, the taste of the coke against my lips was indescribable.

In closing, I'd like to share a poem I've written that contains some Frankenstein metaphors. The poem comes from a classroom interaction with a student. It was the winter semester, and we were all bundled trying to keep warm in the drafty education building. I asked the class to describe the cities they have visited in their lives, and the student responded that she had been incarcerated so long that she could not remember the names of any towns she had been to. The moment struck me, and conjured in my mind the same imagery of Promethean bondage

that inspired Mary Shelley. For the sake of her confidentiality, I have changed her name to Justine.

"Pseudo-Rondeau for a Prison Classroom"

Mittens grip a printed poem quaking with fall's first shiver.
We plunder its body like yeggs cracking at a casket's sliver.
I mention (M.) Shelley and boot-clomp past the colossal fact
some bards in class have stuffed parts in a garbage sack.
With practiced hands, do we grasp the quill or quiver?

Writing time: I'm electrified with a prompt to deliver.
Bethink a city you've seen. Retrieve its streets and rivers.
Some recall family farms with apple orchards out back
but Justine can't remember the names of places she's been.

Chained to rock waiting for some thunder god to forgive her,
as class ends she considers the multiple meanings of *trigger*.
At an after-hours bar a flourishing gurgle in my tract;
I can't stop pondering—while Old Crow chews my liver—
that Justine can't remember the names of places she's been.

Part III: The Slam

The only rule observed at the annual Ohio Meatgrinder poetry slam is there is a three-minute time limit. All the other usual rules—no props, no costumes, no musical accompaniment—are thrown out the window. One poet read their poem while playing piano. One poet read their poem while lying in a wooden casket. According to organizer Scott Woods, one poet "gave herself an insulin shot during her poem in the rhyme scheme of Seuss' Green Eggs and Ham." Some poets switched teams in the middle of the bout. Some destroyed props on stage. Attendees often applauded acts that most artfully buck the conventions of structured slam competitions. One of Woods' social media posts was vaguely alarming to followers at home: "We officially have open flame." Not all of the performances are absurdist: Zach Hannah performed a poem called "Hall of Mirrors," while other poets held full length mirrors in front of the audience. Poet Joseph Harris staged a mixed-media performance, reading a poem while playing a montage of home videos he edited together. The video began with footage of his wife and him at the hospital, viewing the sonogram of their third child. The video showed scenes of his wife playing and roughhousing with the boy when he is older, and included the caption, "a special bond between mom and son." Harris' poem added context to the video that his wife passed away in a car accident in 2016. The tension of mediums met in the middle at bittersweet. He told me later via social media that "the video was meant to show how strong their connection was." He said it added a "layer of depth," and gave the performance a "behind the scenes" feel.

The purpose of Meatgrinder is to celebrate the spirit of poetry slam before tournaments evolved into a mechanized process. Aptowicz (2008) pointed out that the official rulebook of the second annual National Poetry Slam in 1992 could fit onto one sheet of paper. By the time the festival celebrated their 20 year anniversary, the rules and protocols had grown into a rule book over 68 pages long. As regional and international competitions evolved into high stakes, systematized productions, the culture and work of slam became more homogenized. A 1988 New York Times article (Johnson) described the field of poets at the Uptown Poetry Slam in Chicago, featuring a "cowboy," a "vietnam veteran," an "ex-boxer." The article stated, "The 81-year-old tavern is a place where police officers and plumbers and students and business executives come to read their works" (p. 4). Smith quipped in the article that "Highfalutin metaphors got no place here" (p. 2). More than thirty years later, poetry slams are populated by "slam poets." Slam is in the curricula for countless secondary schools and MFA programs (Rohter, 2009). There are more highfalutin metaphors now, but a lot of the poems still cut through the bullshit.

Meatgrinder harkens back to a time when poetry slam was a means for breaking rules set by the academy, and serves as a perfect metaphor to introduce Part III of this dissertation: "The Slam." This section is "staged chaos," breaking several conventions and rules of traditional ethnography. Readers won't find many thesis statements or guiding questions, and are instead invited to come with me as I search for meaning in each piece. Some chapters are written in present tense, some in the past. I am not going to overanalyze poems and spoil the journey for the reader. Some of the chapters are told in prose. Some are poems. Some are "prose poems," which are narratives that use poetic qualities like metaphor (Hirsch, 2014) Some are "hybrid" or "pleated" texts, synthesizing participants stories with my own (Hirsch, 2014) Like Joseph Harris' multimodal performance, meaning can be made in the juxtaposition of these little stories.

Poets competing in slams often don't know which poems they are going to perform on a given night: they must listen to the energy of the audience and crowd, and intuitively run the

poem they feel will embolden the mood of the room. The chapters in Part III include the stories I "felt" needed to be shared. By combining my perspective with dozens of other stakeholders, my intent was to create a kaleidoscope of shifting voices that tell stories of the multitude of hardships that educators, poets, and students face in the current fiscal and socio-political climate. Eidoo et al. (2011) conceptualized the image of the kaleidoscope as a critical paradigm, a view that is "changed and refracted by the interconnection and overlap among diverse perspectives and identities" (p. 61). These chapters are interconnected clusters of fragments. Butler-Kisber and Stewart (2009) said, "poetry clusters have value in qualitative inquiry because of the varied possibilities they afford, and the richer meaning they portray" (p. 5).

Many people don't know that most regional and international poetry slam competitions are team events. Teams often consist of four (or five) poets with diverse stories and voices. While each poet may have their own style, they typically share a common team name. They may coordinate their styles of dress and conduct unified call-and-response chants in competition.

Part III is structured like a six team, four round poetry slam bout (or 6 X 4). The theme of each "team" of chapters is based on Sullivan's six characteristics of poetry (2009): "concreteness," "voice," "emotion," "ambiguity," "tension," and "associative logic." Since I am conceptualizing Sullivan's themes as teams of poets in a slam, I decided to call them "t(h)eams." In other words, a t(h)eam is the application of one of Sullivan's six themes to the worldview of spoken word pedagogy. Just like a four round poetry slam, each t(h)eam features four "pieces." The grouping of each t(h)eam of four chapters is somewhat arbitrary, and readers may see that many of Sullivan's six themes overlap across other t(h)eams in this dissertation. However, each chapter (or fragment, or poem, or "piece") is meant to stand on its own. There is no set order to read these chapters—they jump between time and setting at a whim. Readers are invited to "remix" these chapters and read them out of order. Knobel and Lankshear (2008) claimed "remix means to take cultural artifacts and combine and manipulate them into new kinds of creative blends" (p. 22). The beginning of each t(h)eam of four chapters includes a brief analysis of Sullivan's (2009) accompanying characteristic, which will give readers context in their reading of Part III of this dissertation. The analysis of each t(h)eam speaks to its four ensuing chapters, as well as characteristics evident in other chapters in this dissertation. Sullivan's (2009) six themes can be seen rippling through this dissertation, including Part I and II. Part III is my attempt to catch these slippery fish in six big nets called t(h)eams.

T(h)eam One: "Concreteness"

In a legendary call-and-response in Southern slam culture, the emcee screams, "Keep it…!" And the crowd responds: "Concrete!" Started by the self-professed *Concrete Generation* from Charlotte, North Carolina, "keeping it concrete" in that context means always coming "hard" and "consistent" on the mic and in life. While *concreteness* is a prevalent metaphor in Southern slam literature, scholars have claimed it is a unique quality of poetic inquiry. Cahmnann-Taylor (2009) pointed to William Carlos William's notable saying, "There are no ideas but in things." Essentially, poetry is a way for writers to create concrete "images, anecdotes, phrases, or metaphors" out of abstractions, theories, and unknowns in the world (Cahmann-Taylor, 2009).

Qualitative researchers can compare this claim to Erickson's notion of "concrete universals" (1986), where such images serve as ideal referents for writers to construct and come back to when needing to revisit a theme. Luce-Kaplar (2009) claimed that poet researchers use "things" as substitutions for "ideas" in their search for *qualia*, which Lodge (2002) defined as the way writers attend to the "specific nature of our subjective experiences of the world" (p. 8). Using concrete universals to situate the self in the search for qualia in the field is not about abandoning truths, but instead about interpreting data through all the "sensory mechanisms" humans have at their disposal. "Concreteness is about embodiment," Sullivan claimed (2009, p. 113), meaning that we as researchers and writers should stay attentive to the way truths are transferred from body to body in the field. In short, when Charlotte poet CP Maze snarled the anaphoric line in the microphone, "We are all dismantled machine guns," the responsibility of the listener is to return to the concrete image again and again when provided different contexts, while being attentive to all the tuning fork tools in the body that are able to receive the poem.

Developing a conceptualization of concreteness helped me consider ways to consider obstacles as metaphorical walls. First, as the metaphor of *concreteness* suggests, there are numerous inherent barriers that exist between poets from the slam community and youth who would benefit from spoken word pedagogy. The first harm to consider is the institutional walls that often prevent poets from accessing sustainable places of learning (McDaniel, 2000). Moje (2000) provided researchers with the term, "unsanctioned literacies," referring to literacy processes that youth find engaging, but aren't often included in the primary curricula in a formal schooling environment. In addition to a lack of representation in curricula, many institutions support suppressive discipline systems that administrators feel are at odds with spoken word pedagogy. For example, a number of researchers have cited instances where they have grappled with administration over rules regarding language and profanity (Alexander-Smith, 2004; Low, 2008).

While the *concreteness* metaphor evidently represents the physical (i.e. systemic) barriers that artist educators face, equal consideration should be given to the attitudinal brick walls that artists, educators, and youth face when trying to implement spoken word curricula into their school. One attitudinal barrier is that some people do not believe poetry can function as a form of scientific inquiry, and therefore don't see the value of practicing such writing skills in an academic space (Cahnmann, 2003). Another attitudinal gap is that some educators and administrators do not feel that they can provide adequate attention to humanities in the classroom because of the emphasis on mandated assessments like standardized tests (Prose, 2017).

Representing the *concreteness* t(h)eam, the chapter "Access Denied" explores the obstacles that teaching artists face when facilitating poetry programs in prisons and juvenile detention centers. Then in "Ghost Stories," I interview a British educator to foster a cross-cultural conversation about using poetry to meet "the standards" set by mandated school

curricula. Then the prose poem, “On Security” explores the policing and surveillance of Black Arts poetry spaces in the United States. Finally, the poem “Hostage Scenarios” reframes the way the words of incarcerated students are conceptualized in prison education.

Access Denied

In which the poet: remixes three audio interview transcripts and three poems to construct a narrative about "barriers" literacy educators face in "most-restrictive learning environments."

The small man
Builds cages for everyone
He
Knows.
While the sage,
Who has to duck his head
When the moon is low,
Keep dropping keys all night long
For the
Beautiful
Rowdy
Prisoners.
— Hafiz

I. The Shutdown Scale

The same month the police killed Michael Brown in Missouri and Robin Williams killed himself in California, I emceed a poetry open mic in a maximum-security prison. It was August of 2014, and I was still learning how to stand in front of a classroom while suppressing devastation. Missile strikes had yet again exploded at the walls between Israel and Gaza, and meanwhile, within the basement walls of an old jailhouse chapel, women in wrinkled jumpsuits stacked one hundred chairs into rows with a quiet fervor. The open mic was the culminating event for a three-week creative writing series, and this was the first special event I coordinated for the facility. I stood on the basement stage, adjusting the volume knob on the crackling amplifier, and watched my new students pace the floor and whisper their lines to themselves.

It takes effort to set up an open mic in a correctional facility: I had to write a proposal for the event, which needed approval from an administrator, warden, and deputy warden. I had to prepare an itemized count of the items I would bring in, for administrators to approve and turn into a "gate release" for officers at the security checkpoint. The gate release also included the names of outside guests I invited, who needed to undergo a federal background check to enter the

facility. I had to prepare a list of the "offenders" participating in the program, who received approval to speak after a "count letter" was crafted and their poems were screened. The count letter also included the names of "offenders" from the "general population," who all had to be screened and approved to attend. Even the flier I made for the event had to be cleared by the Public Information Officer in the facility, to ensure I wasn't leaking some nefarious scheme in coded script. Finally, I had to court some volunteers to help serve as ushers (i.e. monitor the line to the bathroom), since the facility was often understaffed on summer evenings. It was the August after my first year as a doctoral student, and my readings on Foucault hadn't quite prepared me for the literacy tasks I needed to master here.

I invited my friend Lauren to watch our showcase. She is an educator and poet, so I asked her to write a poem about what she witnessed at our first open mic.

> (excerpt of Barred Hymnal)
>
> They spoke of lovers lost, children missed, and the things with feathers that perched in their soul. The cheered for one another. They found community in a place whose existence deindividualize one's humanity to a prisoner number; a place that filters out all the good stuff about someone until all that's left is the label "criminal." Here, in this prison poetry performance space—in the middle of a linoleum-floored sanctuary with a wooden stage and folding chairs for the audience—the women spoke and listened. They listed the litany of challenges they've faced and overcome; they reclaimed their titles of partner, parent, parishioner, and friend. They exacted clarity on the tizzy-dizzy truncated versions of their stories that led them to make the choice that landed them there.

The audience roared as the second poet exited the stage. I remember placing the mic back in the stand and hearing the sound of the applause humming in the hall. As I stood on stage, reading the third poet's name, I heard echoes of yells out on the floor. Then I saw, in slow motion, traces of swinging fists. I remember the scene now in fragments, almost like my memory added a tattered disco ball. The fight erupted right next to Lauren. Her poem continues:

> In a flash the giver and receiver of anger jumped up, flung towards one another—fists, nails, and violent words. Clumps of hair tangled up in fingers that weren't able to wrap themselves around writing utensils that, maybe, in a world where they have enough, could help them rip out their anger and put pen to pad to translate it into conviction. This

> fight, such a contrast to the liberation on stage, reinforced just how trapped some of the women still were, and are.

The Shutdown Dissociation Scale (Schalinski, Schauer & Elbert, 2010) lists a number of trauma responses, conceptualizing emotional shutdown as a spectrum.

Flight. Fight. Fright. Flag. Faint.

I froze. Onstage I stood in front of a wired microphone, and stammered shouts and gibberish while pointing at the violence in the crowd. I recollect the rest in parts. My students went to break up the melee, risking serious repercussions for stepping in. This was their church.

A correctional officer (C.O.) stormed in the room. "Sit down!" a sound drummed from the bottom of his lungs. A congregation of women sat at the same time, save the poor woman crumpled on the floor. Time coalesced once again. My bearings came back, and a fear seized me. *Don't shut us down. Please, don't shut us down.* I remember suppressing devastation. I remember wondering if prayers are answered from this stage. Lauren's poem concludes:

> And, in that moment, I understood how much inequity exists between the pain of those on the "outside" with those who are in: the womens' mental health, and their pain—was it taken as seriously as those without their labels and characteristics? Does our society seek to solve their impetus for violence as it does for the privileged who are denied access to where they live? What resources are the women actually accessing within their cells and within this prison? Why is it that the liberation on stage seems like such a welcomed counternarrative to the women's day-to-day? And then, I saw my friend Adam, and his students, and so many of their supporters in the audience, being fraught with fear that the one space in which they felt they were seeking fullness would be stripped away, emptied of its merit because its goodness might be filtered down to this one fight.

The C.O. led the woman who started the brawl out by the arm, and quietly, the woman on the floor stood up and followed them out, clutching her head in cupped hands. I stood silently in front of a sea of watching eyes, and we all slowly realized no one was coming to stop us.

I spoke a call-and-response into the microphone: "Poetry is good…"

"All the time." The women shouted from their seats.

"And all the time," I said.

"Poetry is good!" they cried.

Then I called the third poet up to the stage, and the crowd cheered with an intensity of a hundred-piece orchestra. In the words of Persian poet Hafiz, we dropped keys all night long.

II. Gatelocking Literacy.

Five years later, poetry readings are no longer scheduled at the women's facility. We had one or two more open mics, but administrators expressed concerns over poems that included grievances about treatment from correctional officers. Our special events were deemed security risks, and discontinued out of fear that participating poets might "incite a riot." Using a creative form of ethnography called "poetic representation" (Richardson, 1997), this chapter is my attempt as a poet to consider how the concept of "shut down" has presented itself in my experience as a teaching artist (Selznik, 2008). Speaking on the state of literacy programming in prison settings, Jacobi (2016) said "We are inessential, dismissible, and easily canceled" (p. 66). While counseling services and religious outreach are often considered fundamental programming in adult facilities, legislated as basic rights, Jacobi explained that educational programs are "notoriously unstable" if the course aims fall outside the purview of safety and security (p. 65).

There is a dire need for humanities programming in places of confinement, where "prison writing" has become a standard practice as a core curricular component (Schwan, 2011). Research shows more than 80% of incarcerated Americans are "functionally illiterate," meaning a person may be able to read and write for basic tasks, yet not possess the literacy and communication skills necessary to succeed after incarceration in a career or in school. For example, a government study (Haigler et al., 1994) showed that prisoners have a higher degree of difficulty processing "information found in documents," a task that is a "necessary part of managing a household and performing on the job" (p. xxii). A basic assumption in my poetry

class is when we unlock meaning in a poem, we are practicing literacy skills that help readers decode texts of various design.

In addition to developing skills needed to succeed upon reentry to society, incarcerated people also need to develop functional literacy skills to succeed within the setting of prison. As Rogers (2013) explained, "inmates need to be able to write to request grievance hearings, conferences and individual help sessions with the GED teachers, and special passes to places such as commissary" (p. 26). Prison literacy then, is often a self-taught process born out of need for incarcerated readers to advocate for themselves. Often incarcerated learners face "considerable difficulties" including "extremely poor" prison libraries, "harassment from prison personnel," "inadequate facilities for study," "prohibition" of materials labeled "subversive," and "occasional confiscation" of books and writing supplies (Franklin, 1979, p. 19). Every semester, students are removed from class because they are sent to the solitary unit, which is often a punitive response issue after arguments with correctional staff. This is why learning to "express yourself" is an important fixture of our poetry class.

Poetic methods (Prendergast, 2009) give me a looking glass to view inward when asking critical questions, unearthing thick descriptions about challenges in a learning space often hidden from public view (Tannenbaum 2000; Johnson & Chernoff 2002). Poetry can provide an introspective reflection of the tensions and struggles artists face when they facilitate creative programming in the "most-restrictive" learning environment (Rutherford, Nelson, & Wolford 1985). Blending poetry and ethnographic writing through creative analytic practices (Richardson, 1999), this chapter serves as a personalized exploration of how the bureaucracy of America's prison system holds the power to destroy even well-supported programs.

The opening narrative of this article was a synthesized mix of my own autoethnographic narrative (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), and my friend Lauren's poem, which I requested as a creative

alternative to an in-person interview. What follows is my attempt to find order in a messy collection of memories, told through a blend of interviews, poems, and autoethnographic narratives. Subverting repressive power in prison settings necessitates adaptive strategies for program implementation (Jacobi, 2016). My hope is that a shifting narrative structure can provide a multifaceted view of a complexly shaky educational landscape.

III. Conveyance

My experiences as a prison educator exist as a mix of memories conveying my body in and out of scenic-deprived spaces around the country. Since my first workshop over twelve years ago, I have wondered why programs that benefit incarcerated people are so easily shut down. I ponder this in front of a friend who used to work as an administrator in a prison, and tells it to me plainly. "More work."

"Just to get people cleared?" I asked.

"I'm telling you: every discussion we had in the program meetings, if it caused anybody more work, the answer was 'no.'" In a climate where humanities programming is considered nonessential, my friend said she faced resistance whenever she tried to "do extra." Administrators who don't "do extra" complain of the excessive paperwork, and belabor the processes as headaches. Furthermore, administrators often cite a capacity issue, arguing that facilities are not properly staffed or resourced enough to "ensure security."

My friend speaks in idioms, saying when she worked in the prison she was always "worried about stepping on people's toes," and that she was often told to "stay in her lane" when she challenged decisions. For years she was often shut down by her colleagues, until eventually, she was shut out of the facility completely.

"I was gatelocked," she said, meaning her access to the facility was permanently denied and she had to be walked off the premises. She was supposed to give me a ride to my first class

of the semester, and I learned her access had been denied the day before the start of the course. As an underfunded grad student with no car, what followed for me was a frantic effort to make it to my class. I wrote about the challenge of getting to and from class in a poem called "Conveyance."

> (Excerpt from "Conveyance")
> *4:26 pm.*
>
> A sign on the door of the intake building reads
> No Cell Phones Allowed on Prison Grounds, so I knew
> I needed to stash my Android some place. Like I could
> wrap it in plastic and chuck it across the road, or turn
> it in at a library lost-and-found to come claim
> when our writing workshop ended at eight.
>
> I used to keep it in the car of a friend who always
> interrupts class to pass out candy root beer barrels,
> but she got gatelocked when a pair of scissors
> went missing at the end of a lesson plan.
>
> She said its pins and needles in that place, so say grace.
> I told her I'm not that good at praying, but I can learn.

<u>IV. Flight. Fight. Fright.</u>

Using a process Brown called "metaphorical representation," (2019) I considered how I might conceptualize the Shutdown Dissociation Scale (Schauer & Elbert, 2010) as a list of images that I can pluck like a flower.

> Freeze. Like flowing waterfall frosting into fixture.
> Flight. Like fly freeing itself from forlorn soda can.
> Fight. Like furry of blows flung at foe in ring.

Research shows that poetry writing in prison settings provides numerous "psychological benefits" such as an "opportunity to build self-esteem," "an outlet to express repressed emotions," and "providing a window of acceptable escapism" (Rothman & Walker, 1997). Researchers have noted a trend of themes typically appear in the poetry of incarcerated writers, often touching on themes such as "politics, sexual deprivation, loneliness, boredom, prison

brutality, lack of freedom, no privacy, imperceptible inroads into the prisoner's mental health, the waste of human potential, and, more globally, the psychological bondage of the African masses to their rulers, who in their turn are controlled by the Western world" (Ogunyemi, 1982, p. 66)

While scholars have given attention to the application of poetry as a "trauma-informed" initiative (Carrello & Butler, 2015), less discussion has centered on how poetry can serve to counter the shutting down of socio-emotional experiences in incarcerated settings. Formerly incarcerated poet Michael Hogan (1979) said that one of the most common experiences in prison is "the gradual numbing of emotion" (p. 11). Brooks and Johnson (2010) stressed that there is an expectation in prison for toxic stress to be "held inside and simply endured" (p. 151). Prisons pose a unique challenge to educators who value socio-emotional learning because "defensive posturing is the normal and expected response to the pressures and constraints of daily life behind bars" (Johnson & Chernoff, 2002, p. 156). Poetry can be a disarming way for incarcerated writers to "express feelings of trauma in their poetry" (Brooks & Johnson, 2010, p. 158), because the confrontation of distressing topics in guided writing can be easier when a testimonial is "disguised as a poem" (Tannenbaum, 2000)

Over the course of my experiences as a teaching artist on the inside, I have come to realize that poetry has a great potential to serve people if conceptualized as trauma-informed care (Wissman & Weissman, 2011). Recently I applied for a research fellowship, and was happy to learn I was awarded funding to support my trauma-informed creative writing program *Writing Our Resilience*. Yet prison after prison turned me down, with administrators sending a similar message in their email. "We don't have the resources to support this program." I didn't understand. The program was funded, staffed, and offered to facilities for free. I became curious about the fostering of relationships with gatekeepers, so I talked to poet Lizz Straight, who used

to organize special events in roughly a dozen facilities, and a popular spoken word-centered radio show that was popular with incarcerated listeners in the Southeastern United States.

She told me she used to ask participants to stand and say affirming things like "I am beautiful," and "I have power." While some administrators "nourished and encouraged" such practices, Lizz "ran into hurdles." Sometimes she would get letters from a warden informing her that she was not welcome back at their facility. Lizz clarified that fear of poetry exists because people in power know they cannot stop the spoken word. But they can stop her. So they did.

Werner (1985) claimed that "one purpose of prison literature is, then, to discover the shape which isolation takes" (p. 21). When feeling isolated, I often turn to haiku as a form. I decided to capture some of Lizz's statements into seventeen syllable images.

testament heard and
hit right in the chest with it
we were waning tides

source of power in
us, a rousing statement that's
almost insightful

sparks inside ourselves
contraband no one can take
words will not leave us

V. Survivor Identities

Assata Shakur (Shakur & Chesimard, 1978) once famously quipped "There are no criminals here" (p. 9), speaking of incarcerated women who have found themselves in the criminal justice system because of experiences with poverty, addiction, and abuse. Over the years, students have listed need after need in their poems, which has encouraged me to consider how poetry can serve the specific needs of women. I asked Ebony Payne, a poet and educator who works with incarcerated youth, about meeting the needs of women in prison. She said, with urgency, "their femininity is something that is stripped of them." Brooks and Johnson (2010)

explained how this is done in many ways: “Prisoners are largely stripped of their identities, assigned numbers for identification, and given plain, nondescript clothing” (p. 148). Johnson and Chernoff (2002) said that “daring to be human” then “poses special risks” (p. 160), because as Ebony expressed it, anything deemed “cosmetic” is labeled as “inessential,” and therefore a threat to security. Ebony told me in the facility she works in, she was threatened with gatelock after she filed a complaint that the facility did not provide girls with equitable access to pads and tampons. She said the girls told her it made them feel, “nasty,” “dirty,” that it “heavily stifled their mental health.”

I have also been threatened with gatelock by raising concern about access to pads and tampons. “They are trying to mute something,” Ebony said. One reason to write cryptically using poetry is because, even here in this dissertation, I fear that I will say something that will instigate a shutdown of my programming. Ebony is less concerned: “I call bullshit when I see it,” she said.

Deep down I recognized there is a connection here between health and wellness access and literacy. I told Ebony that I struggle to convey the connection. She said, “literacy for me is a means for people to communicate. It improves the quality of your life.” She said the purpose of literacy is learning to advocate for oneself, which is why questions can be seen as dangerous. She equated the rationing and confiscation of menstrual products to the practice of rationing and confiscating “pencils, papers, journals” and other classroom materials. Prison literacy is initially an awakening that meaning can be made in the fragments of texts immediately surrounding the reader (Boudin, 1993). Poetry can be useful here, because “oral and visual reflection on their experiences helped the women reconstruct their identities as survivors, organize their ideas, and see their lives take shape through images” (Williams & Taylor, 2004, p. 51). Jacobi (2008) noted that a shift in the process of prison literacy occurs over time, stressing that as “individuals become more comfortable with a writer-as-self identity, many move beyond their immediate

conditions and write about more systematic issues" (p. 71 – 93). Literacy then becomes an act to shut down, because as Berger (2011) stated, many administrators believe it is a best practice to keep incarcerated people "misinformed about what is happening elsewhere in the world" (p. 53).

Johnson and Chernoff (2002) expressed the stark necessity of educational programs, saying "For inmates, correctional programs can take on an urgent, life-and-death quality. They sense that this may be their last chance. They have failed at most everything they have tried. A failed program symbolizes a failed life" (p. 164). As formerly incarcerated poet Reginald Dwayne Betts (2016) stressed, we need to shift policy decisions away from fear, and take an audit of what we truly believe people should learn during confinement. We should not expect people to surrender their self-respect to respect the law (Baldwin, 1966).

After several stressful weeks and narrowly escaping the murmured threats of gatelock, I walked into the prison with a pensive step. Like Ebony I had reached a breaking point, and risked the stability of my class because I had to say something. As I walked into my classroom, thinking of the various ways I had seen shutdown, I was surprised to find a maxi pad laying on the shelf of the dry erase board, covered with black marker smudges. I picked it up, and conceptualized "fight" as an image, as I used it to erase the letters on the board.

Ghost Stories

In which the poet: remixes two audio interview transcripts and two poems to explore the conflicts between spoken word poetry and "standardized education."

I was standing in the auditorium of a high school, challenging students to write their own "Frankenstein stories." "Do you know any ghost stories?" I asked them. "Are there things in the world that scare you or haunt you at night? Who are the monsters in society?"

In her preface to the 1831 edition, Mary Shelley claimed she was encouraged to write *Frankenstein* at a small party of writers, who were reading a book of German ghost stories to one another. "We will each write a ghost story," said Lord Byron, and his proposition was acceded to" (p. vii). Inspired by stories of galvanization and grave robbing, the teenage author created the horror icon of "the creature." Byron's doctor John Polidori contributed a story called *The Vampyr,* considered to be the first vampire story written in the English language (Seymour, 2000). Byron's challenge unwittingly launched the genres of horror and science fiction, and created the two most iconic monsters in contemporary mythology. Over the next 200 years, countless writers would also accede to Byron's propositions, and write their own stories about bloodsuckers and walking corpses. "This is the spirit of FrankenSlam," I told students in the auditorium. And then I challenged them to go gravedigging and create their own creature.

One student used the metaphor of the creature to explore the topic of voice. The creature of Shelley's novel provided Byronic exposition on the nature of love and life. In more contemporary iterations the creature is a grunting brute. The topic of voice encourages the reader to consider the voice of teen author, a 200-year contemporary of Mary Shelley.

> Oh dear creature,
> You used to articulate so well.
> You used to baffle us all with eloquent speech.
> Scholars of my world would praise your prose,
> But over time your interpretation grew cold.
> your once soulful being grew rigid and stiff.
> They took your form,

Added bolts to your once human reminiscent body.
They took your heart,
Plucking it out of you like your personal Prometheus had once unidentified corpse.
But worst of all
They took your voice.
Villagers still, never changing, harsh, and wrathful
Took your tongue and morphed your tongue.
You once spoke in such expressive dialogue
And transformed you to a groaning, moaning being.
They took your articulated spirit
And that is the biggest tragedy of the story.

The works in most English Literature curricula are ghost stories by default. The canon is filled with the pale corpses of men. Though it is often included in the canon today, at one time Mary Shelley was just a teen remixing the tropes of her favorite authors. *Frankenstein* included allusions to several writers in the English canon, like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Milton, and Shakespeare. Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner" was haunted by an albatross. Milton's "Satan" was cast away by his creator.

My reason for creating FrankenSlam, is frankly, because I was bored by my poetry classes as a teenager. Many English curricula only include poems from the time of Mary Shelley: John Keats; Lord Byron; Percy Shelley. "Predominantly dead white male authors," one teacher told me about her poetry curriculum. "I don't teach a lot of modern poetry." I wanted to conduct an interview with a colleague I'll call Calita, a British educator in Yorkshire. Their country has a nationally standardized curriculum that includes a list of essential texts. Calita has worked in two schools in Yorkshire: one was a predominately white school in a working class neighborhood, and one was a girl's school of primarily East Asian immigrant children. I have had the opportunity to visit both of her schools. For some students, I would be the only living poet they would experience that year. My friend is a second generation Kashmiri woman, and I asked her what she thinks about teaching a ethnocentric canon to a nonwhite student body. "They don't see

themselves in our literature, she said. “So I have to find a different way of making it appeal to them.”

Calita said a problem with centering a curriculum on the stories of men like Charles Dickens is that the voices who criticized Charles Dickens become erased. While Calita has to center her curricula on Dickens, she said she does use poems from living artists as supplemental texts. This gives students in diverse schools an opportunity to see themselves represented in the curriculum. But Calita stressed to me that it is important for white students to also read literature by racially diverse authors. She told me a story from her first school, when a white student called another student a “Paki”—an ethnic slur for Pakistani people. She said:

> I had to sit down and explain to him that was racist. And as a Kashmiri, it’s quite offensive to myself. He said to me, “I just thought you had a really good tan.” Because I was his teacher, and I stood up in front of him and taught the class, I couldn’t be anything other than white, despite visibly being so very different.

Calita believes the student thought she was white by default, because his conceptualization of an expert was framed by the stories of white thinkers. Calita said this is why she enjoys including the works of authors of diverse perspectives in her curriculum. When I first met Calita, she had designed a poetry unit that included both Geoffrey Chaucer and Tupac Shakur. While one is canon, the other is not: yet both used slang and wordplay to construct timeless narratives. Calita made it clear that the raps of Tupac Shakur are not “lesser texts” to lily pad over to Chaucer. Each are unique perspectives and different avenues to engage with words.

Calita lamented that since there is such a focus on standardized testing, the practice of poetry writing has virtually disappeared from her instruction. Calita told me that some of the students I met are still writing and reading at open mics, seven years after I encouraged them to write their own stories. Calita claimed this discursive nature of poetry encourages young people to develop a wider scope for seeing the world “Connecting the two, bridging the gap,” she said. “It is about being human, but it’s about not being a narrow human.”

There are countless English classrooms that include a poetry reading curriculum, but not a poetry writing curriculum. I've challenged hundreds of students to write their own Frankenstein stories. I hope that teachers learn a lesson from the story of young writers sharing ghost stories with one another during a lightning storm, and then composing their own chilling tales to share with future readers. During a workshop in Michigan, a librarian used the metaphor of amalgamation to tell her own story. She and her sister had recently tested their DNA with Ancenstry.com, and learned they had an older brother they had never met, from before their parents were married. "I knew I needed to write about it," she said. "I just had no idea where to even start." She wrote in her poem, "There is no stuffing this electric news back into the sky."

Her poem described the first time she and her sister went to meet him for dinner. In an interview, she told me she was floored by the scene of sitting around the table with people who mirrored features. "He's got her chin," she said. "He's got her nose. He's got my dad's smile." She laughed, "And my ears." She explained to me that she and her sister never looked alike, but that he is "the stitching" between them. She said that the creature was "such a handy metaphor" to adopt and write her own experiences. Her story of amalgamated faces helped her reframe some important questions in her life. "What does family look like now," she said. "Where do we stitch it now? It will never be seamless."

On Security

In which the poet: writes a prose poem about the intervention of police surveillance and Black art, using a sign that he ripped down from the door of a hotel in North Carolina.

Because I am white and well-versed in the art of bullshitting, it is often my job at Southern Fried to talk to cops. It is also my job because I am Vice President. Sometimes it is Kirk's job, who is also white. He is our Tournament Director, a chill hippie with an unassuming stance. Sometimes it is Shadow's job. Our President and CEO, Shadow is a Black man—but his slow roll and soothing demeanor somehow puts men in power at ease.

This is a reality when you host a de facto Black Arts festival in the American South.

We talk to all the cops: city police; state troopers; deputy sheriffs; bouncers at venues; meter maids; event security; rent-a-cops; even park rangers.

I once saw a poet perform a poem for highway patrol after they pulled him over. On the side of the road, my friend dug into his own spirit and pulled out something that made the guys chuckle. They walked away without searching the car and the pockets of the Black artists sitting inside it.

There is something to be said about poets possessing the art of finesse (Oliver, 1989). While many patrons of our festival focus on the lyrical alchemy poets stir on stage, the most impressive wordplay goes to the turns of phrase spoken to the men who want to shut the party down.

Once at a tournament in North Carolina I heard singing in the hallways of the host hotel. I followed the winding corridor toward the ballooning sound. Two heavy metal doors I had not seen before were now shut and blocking the entrance to the lobby. A crude sign was taped to the door, seemingly printed from the office printer:

> THE DOOR IS CLOSED DUE TO THE NOISE IN THE LOBBY!!!! Guest <sic> still have access in and out but please close the door after you exit.
>
> Signed by: Front desk.

Someone had crossed out the word NOISE and written in pen: "Awesome Poetry!"

As soon as I opened the door I heard the sounds of a hundred people singing at the same time. Keep in mind it was after 1:00 am. When I entered the lobby the room was packed with poets, singing Prince and Lionel Richie. Poets were at the tables playing spades and braiding hair. There was a cypher in the center of the room, of emcees trading verses around a circle. Shots were lined up at the unmanned bar, and poets shared drinks and bites of takeout food at the counter. This was the sound of unfettered, unapologetic joy. And that sound was loud.

Near the foyer I saw Shadow speaking with a police officer. The man was older, and also Black. His arms were folded and his head was shaking. Shadow spoke with one hand on his heart and another on the man's shoulder. Someone near the hotel had called the cops, said some Black folks were congregating. They were worried someone would break into cars in the parking lot.

This is a reality when you host a de facto Black Arts festival in the American South. There were some white folks in the lobby. A few Asian-American and Latino poets too. But we all respect the need for affinity (Gee, 2005). In these spaces we speak up for one another. When it was his turn, Shadow used his voice to finesse a man with a gun to walk away and let the party roll.

More needs to be said about the intersection of Black Art and surveillance (Browne, 2015). More needs to be said about the intersection of Black Art and security (Weiss, 2011).

In the interim I can dedicate space to this cause and speak up when it is my turn.

I talked to cops almost every day of that North Carolina festival. One evening, some poets and I snuck off site to grab some dinner at a little cafe. While sipping drinks outside, a homeless woman walked by our table. She was screaming at the sky and stripping off her clothes. She paced down the street pounding her fist in her palm. She was naked and arguing with no one.

Squad cars circled. Sirens flashed and police popped out of their car doors. They screamed commands, confused that she would not respond to them. She stammered in the road and stomped her feet like they weren't there. The police moved their feet closer to the Black woman in the road. The police moved their hands closer to their guns.

I stood from my table and walked toward them, letting my upturned palms lead me. I said, "Excuse me officers. She didn't hurt nobody. She is just sick and needs some help."

Other poets were there, but my whiteness was like some video game cheat code. Their energy shifted, and they got in their cars and drove away. The woman proceeded down the strip, seemingly unaware that the air almost smelled like smoke.

A young Black woman approached me. She said she tried to reason with the police too, but they listened to me differently. She started crying and asked for a hug. "I thought no one would speak up for her," she kept repeating over and over. "I thought no one would speak up for her."

Hostage Scenarios

In which the poet: writes a poem about literacy learning in a stigmatized learning environment.

When you train to teach
in a maximum security prison
you are invited to concoct
hostage scenarios.

Imagine a dictionary
stripped of its spine.

Imagine that spine
sharpened to a shiv.

Imagine that shiv
pressed against your ribs.

Manifest a massive
standoff in your mind
of shouting and sirens and
you pleading just to live.

The key is to make a picture
that exhausts all the possibilities.

That a pencil can be broken
and poking against your throat.
That a book can be repurposed
to bludgeon your skull.

That you may be captured,
made to swap spaces and clothes
so the SWAT thinks
you are your students.
Something to shoot.

This is why
you start every session
asking your class to
tell you who they are.

I am a mirror of my mother.
I am a reflection of my crime.
I never thought myself a student
but now I am running out of time.

I am here to learn

to make weapons
with my words.

And you say
maybe this pen
doesn't need to be
a weapon.

Maybe—

This pen
is the taste of greasy
cheeseburger juice dripping
down your chin.

This pen
is a blown kiss
captured in your
daughter's chubby hand.

This pen
is a crooning jukebox
and a pair of hands
placed on your hips.

This pen is not a weapon.
This pen is a violin.

Now the paper is a concert space.
There's an instrument in your hand.
Imagine all the possibilities and
play all the notes you can.

This pen is where we're going.
It is not where we've been.
This pen is not a weapon.
This pen is a pen.

T(h)eam Two: "Voice"

In cities with mass transit systems, like New York City and Paris, it is not uncommon to see a poet passionately perform their verse while standing on a train or subway platform. It is a method for artists to engage with an unsuspecting public (and maybe make a few bucks). Faulkner (2009) connected the theme of voice to poet Phil Memmer's assessment called "the bus-stop test." She explained, "If you can recite your poem to people at a bus stop, and they don't ask 'what?' then you can use the language when writing in form" (p. 19). Faulkner claimed there is a "sense of connection" between voice and a sense of "authenticity," which she defined as language that draws connections to an audience's lived experience, regardless if those experiences are similar. As Low (2011) mentioned, the idealized desire for authenticity is often referred to as "keeping it real." In her ethnographic account of a spoken word unit in a language arts classroom, she pointed to a conception among students which states that while poets are allowed to adopt the voices of other people, hip hop artists are strictly required to "tell it like it is" in regards to staying authentic to their lived experiences.

One question all poets must consider, in terms of voice, is when it is appropriate to use their art to speak for other people (Chappell, 1991). Richardson (1997) pointed to a similar debate among academic feminists in regards to the notion of "giving voice" to those who have been quieted or silenced, stating that "this impulse, of course, raises postmodernist questions about authority, subjectivity, and ownership, issues that are of concern to feminist theory and practice" (p. 57). In Alcoff's (1991) *The Problem of Speaking For Others*, she cited two primary harms in adopting another's voice in writing:

> Premise (1): The "ritual of speaking" (as defined above) in which an utterance is located always bears on meaning and truth such that there is no possibility of rendering positionality, location, or context irrelevant to content… (p. 14).

> Premise (2): All contexts and locations are differentially related in complex ways to structures of oppression. Given that truth is connected to politics, these political differences between locations will produce epistemic differences as well (p. 15).

Alcoff (1991) conceded that because we as a society are connected in an "intricate, delicate web" where our actions always affect one another, there is no actual, ideal way "to avoid the problematic of speaking for by retreating into an individualist realm" (p. 21). Leggo (2009) claimed there is a complementary problem in writing solely from the perspective of the *I,* claiming "this *I* is never isolate and alone. Each of us, wrapped up in the seemingly singular identity of an autonomous *I*, is really always connected to others. Sorting out those connections occupies our whole lives" (p. 162).

One evident harm regarding *voice* is that some slammers feel their identity, and their mission, is often misrepresented when collaborating with institutions. Educators can better engage their students if they include literacies relevant to the voices of youth (Alexander-Smith, 2004), however, more rigid institutions have been less willing to provide a space for young people where they can speak with terms and tones they often practice in the home (Alim, 2007). The dismissal of voice may be due in part to spoken word's reliance on orality, which the academy has "historically dismissed" in favor of nonoral traditions more commonly valued in institutions of learning (Parmar & Bain, 2007). And while the colonization of language is a major harm, another concern is that many educators fail to celebrate the uniqueness of diverse voices. For example, some educators in the community argue that the availability of video and audio of poems has promoted an overreliance on modeling, which compels novice poets to dilute their voice through constant emulation of others (Parmar & Bain, 2007). This is just one of many things for educators to consider in honoring the importance of voice in storytelling.

Second, the *voices* of poets, especially women poets, queer poets, poets of color, and poets with disabilities, can be silenced or maligned, both within and outside the slam community,

which has a direct impact on both youth and adults from marginalized communities (Bauridl, 2010; Fox, 2010). Weinstein and West (2012) pointed out that when poets share writing related to their identity and personal ideology, "they sometimes find themselves fenced in by their own words in ways that later feel confining" (p. 293). Cahnmann (2003) claimed that poet researchers can also be boxed in this way, because writers often feel compelled to adopt institutional language to have their work published or awarded a grant. Somers-Willett (2009) warned that poets from diverse ethnic backgrounds can see their voices tokenized and fetishized when audiences are not trained to be culturally competent and reciprocal of respect.

In considering the *voice* t(h)eam, the first chapter "My Favorite Poets are Third Graders" explores using spoken word poetry to help students develop voice in elementary schools. The second chapter, "Typos are Humane" is a hybrid narrative about turning the stories of others into a poem through Poetry On Demand. The third chapter, "On Culture and Costumes" explores the tensions of appropriation and fetishization of institution-sponsored spoken word events. Finally, the prose poem "Sound Off" vocalizes the intersection of listening and disability.

My Favorite Poets are Third Graders

In which the poet: remixes one audio interview, one video interview, two poems, and a newspaper article to craft a narrative about spoken word and elementary education.

Every once in a while, I am asked to facilitate poetry programming for elementary school kids. On rare occasions, I am invited to perform for younger children, such as kindergartners and toddlers. I have even been asked to write or perform for a baby. Can you imagine making art for a baby? Are there best practices for that?

One day while sitting at a Poetry On Demand booth at a crowded festival, a young woman approached me and asked for a poem. She wondered if I would write a poem for the baby that her sister plans on adopting. She and her husband had struggled to get pregnant, and turned to adoption after years of heartache. Their first adoption had fallen through, a painful experience for the whole family. However, the two tried again, and were delighted to learn they were set to adopt a baby born the previous Friday. My poem would encapsulate these feelings of struggle and celebration into an artifact they could put in a baby book or frame on the wall.

My first thoughts were not elegant. My first thoughts were things like "wow" and "holy crap." How do I capture such an immensely complex story in a poem meant for an audience who cannot read or speak? "Oh," the woman added. "And my sister and her husband love Harry Potter. Can you put something about that in there too? They would love that." Suddenly my dilemma was solved. I wasn't writing poetry for a baby. I was writing a poem for the literacy community that surrounded the baby, who would use stories like Harry Potter to construct a value system and worldview with the baby. This poem would be for every person who visited the home and peeked down at the crib, or for the friends on social media who have been a part of their baby store for years. I wrote a poem about the imagined world that this baby would learn in. I wrote it to the adult this baby may grow up to be, with the nurturing of this community. I synthesized descriptions given to me about this family, and wrote this poem:

The hospital was playing our wedding song
when you were born, and immediately
it was clear what the sorting hat
had in store for this family.

You arrived on a Friday, at the end
of a long week, following a long
summer and spring--years really,
of trying, of adoption processes,
of sitting quietly at the bed's edge.

Now here you are: the calmest 'awe'
at the end of a storm. Wide eyes
and a fiery ring of curly hair.

We're going to fit you in so many hats,
smart outfits, and maybe wizard capes,
as we learn all the ways to love you.

My experience writing a poem for a baby—and the community who will educate this baby—made me wonder why I don't get more opportunities to engage with little kids. Approximately 98% of this dissertation is dedicated to programming for secondary students and adults, and you might find a similar discrepancy on the literature regarding elementary education and poetry programs labeled "slam" and "spoken word" (Henze, 2017) Yes, there are teachers and mentors who host slams for elementary age children, but I need to make an important distinction here. There are thousands of poets from the slam community who form a network of teaching artists who market their services directly to secondary schools, colleges, and writing programs for teens. Very few of my artist friends follow the same track as Allan Wolf, for example, who can be found dancing and reciting poems in elementary school gymnasiums and libraries all over the United States. Wolf possesses a unique skill set for an author. The founder of the Southern Fried Poetry Slam, Wolf has an MFA, like many accomplished writers. But Wolf also knows how to juggle and play the jaw harp and banjo. He possesses the gift to make his words engaging to all readers, and the "pizazz" to capture the attention spans of squirrelly littles.

I was curious to learn more about elementary education, when I was invited by a paraeducator to host a poetry slam for 1st - 5th graders at an urban elementary school. There would be a 3rd - 5th grade division, and a "peewee" division. Though I could not collect data from children, I wanted to ask two educators about their experiences using spoken word with young children. I thought their perspectives might help me prepare for the shorty slam.

I first wanted to talk to my new friend—I'll call her Tiara—who works as a paraeducator (or para), an employee who provides instructional support to certified teachers in a school building (Downing, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000). She told me that she started the poetry club because she wanted more opportunities to enrich the learning of her students after school. She said she knew she could get some girls to come, but she wasn't as sure about the boys. So she came up with a plan. "I tricked them," she told a local media outlet covering the upcoming slam ("Poetry Club Ready to Battle at First Poetry Slam," 2019). "I told the boys that it was about rap. I also told them that girls would be in the club." 40 students showed up to her callout meeting, and most stuck with it throughout the semester long enough to perform at the slam.

Tiara admitted to me that she "doesn't know the first thing about poetry." She said she wanted to start a club because she knows it is a powerful and engaging artform for kids. Though she hasn't studied poetry formally, Tiara represents perhaps the most important stakeholder in poetry literacy communities: the organizer. She may have felt unqualified to teach the classes, but she felt empowered to reach out to a dozen poets in the city to see if they would volunteer an hour of their time. She wrote grants, called people for donations, and crowdsourced funding on social media. For the slam she passed out free handcrafted t-shirts and berets, both donated. Winners of the slam received donated books and gift cards for food. She didn't make a single dime. It is necessary to highlight Tiara's skill set, because it demonstrates that there is more than one avenue for advocates to support a literacy community. While this network is comprised with

artists and scholars, healthy literacy communities are also sustained by event organizers working behind the scenes. “Do you know how to get a hold of Tracy K. Smith?” Tiara asked me one day.

“The Poet Laureate of the United States?” I replied.

Yeah,” Tiara said. “I want to see if she’ll volunteer to come visit.”

I gave her the number of her publicist, which I retrieved from the internet, and reminded her that Smith’s speaking fee was upwards of 10,000 dollars.

“Hey, don’t count it out,” said an administrator in the room. “Tiara has convinced all kinds of people to give her stuff.”

After talking to Tiara, I reached out to my friend Mike who teaches third grade at a Title I school on the east coast. I asked him if he ever felt like he used poetry as a trick or surprise in the classroom. “The whole thing is a trick,” he responded with his arms wide. By being goofy and having fun, he said he tricks students into engaging with literature and classroom content. “I call everything a poem,” he said with a big grin. He told me his goal in modeling literacy practices is “just showing them the beauty of language and calling it poetry.” He said that if a student says something inciteful, he’ll say “that’s a poem!” or “that’s a hot bar.” In his view, all poetry is a trick to get kids to practice self-expression:

> Even if it is your favorite color, write about your favorite color. Or if you hate homework, or how much you love chicken nugget Thursdays. It’s that simple. It doesn’t have to be pain or traumatic. It doesn’t have to be deep. It is just a simple self-expression: what you love, what you don’t. What you hate, what you don’t.

In addition to teaching elementary school for 25 years, Mike also published his first book of poetry for children, under his classroom nickname “Mr. B.” Mr. B believes that poems help young people view life “as a snapshot,” instead of as long, rambling stories. This can be an important lesson for children learning to articulate their worldview, and the book *Said the Paper*

to the Pen provides many snapshots of a classroom of young dreamers. The idea of using poetry to create an imagined, ideal classroom community is showcased in "If Only."

If only
I said, "Hello"
Instead of walking by.
If only
I spoke up
Instead of acting so shy.
If only
I yelled, "Stop!"
Instead of freezing with a stare.
If only
I stopped for a moment
And showed you someone cared.
I could have
made a difference,
breathed life back in your day.
If only,
I tried to help
take your pain away.

I asked him why he preferred working with elementary school kids, when a lot of our poet friends work with teens or college students. He replied:

> When you listen to an eight year old's pure thoughts, and it's just so innocent and free. That is where a lot of my inspiration comes from. I always tell people my favorite poets are third graders, because everything is so pure and honest and real. There is no hidden agenda, there's no really complex politics behind it. It's just kid's writing, and learning to have fun writing, instead of hating it. Which is something that needs to be broken in the classroom, is how kids don't like to write. And how teachers don't like to teach writing. And I find poetry is a fun way to introduce kids to writing. If you find the right poems and are energetic and you are enthused with what you are doing, then the kids in turn will be enthusiastic, and give you that same energy back.

I was curious to hear his opinion about why there weren't more poets who went into elementary education. He sat and thought for a while, and responded, "Little kids are hard, man. You know, you have to entertain them, and you have to understand them a little bit more." He added that "some poets take themselves too seriously," and that you need to approach the elementary classroom with a different spirit. "If you work with little kids you just have to be a fool," he said. "You have to accept the fact that you have to be corny." Although this may seem

like a small barrier, some poets may resist being perceived as corny. Corniness can be read as the antithesis of authenticity, which is an important capital for spoken word poets (Somers-Willett, 2009).

Some poets also lack the ability (or willingness) to sanitize their adult image and content of their poetry for a young audience. I asked my friend if his identity as Mr B was ever compromised by his identity as Big Mike. He laughed uproariously. Before I knew he was a teacher or children's book author, I first experienced the poetry of Big Mike when he was featured on HBO's *Def Poetry*. His content was not kid-friendly. The opening stanzas read:

> Six foot one, 275 pounds, 2 percent muscle and 98 percent body fat
> See I'm not the prettiest mother*****
> But I am a sexy a$$ bitch
>
> A big sexy bald man
> that has marks on this body to compliment you
> Pretty boys get tattoos,
> BABY, I sport fatoos
> Stretch marks to compliment your culinary skills
> a minimum 3 plates to let you know that you "let it burn"
> I show my love in pounds… A Lot
> Size 44 waist , B cup titties
> See, I'm not the prettiest mother****
> But damn I'm a sexy

Mike laughed and said luckily his students are too young to stumble across content like this, but some of them do when they get older. He said he has come across comments like "that was my teacher!" written underneath videos of poems with explicit content. While he says his identities don't crash together often, he did turn down an interview for the local paper. The newspaper heard that a local teacher was going to be featured on HBO, but Mike turned down the opportunity because he didn't want the performance to tarnish his reputation as an advocate for literacy in the local education community. While he said this was a small concession, it still shows that poets may have to compromise parts of their identity to appease other adults who are also involved in the literacy communities of young children.

Mike told me he wrote "Sexy" as a way to take command of a literacy space. I can write a poem too. I can be sexy too. And though "Sexy" is arguably inappropriate for an elementary school audience, the act of using poetry as a form of subversion is an interesting strategy for elementary educators to consider. Two poems in "Mr. B's" book emulated William Carlos Williams' poem "This is Just to Say." Mike likes to riff on famous poems, because he said it shows everyone is skilled enough to write a poem too. "We can do it better," he said, seemingly mocking the sacred cows of the poetry world. "They're old and gone!" In a way, Mr. B and Big Mike stand opposite of each other in these remixed poems: there is Mr. B, a teacher who buzzes about the authors who've laid the foundation for the world's literary landscape. And there is also Big Mike, the rowdy slammer, ready to battle the greats and try to come out on top. In Mr. B's version of "This is Just to Say," he substituted classroom snacks for Williams' infamous stolen plumb. "There's no connection to a damn plum," he joked, saying that he used relevant images from his students' lifeworld to make the poem fresh. "These kids ain't eating plums from the refrigerator."

My night emceeing the elementary school slam was a frenetic success. Dozens of parents and relatives came, and Tiara even convinced the Superintendent to be a judge. I spent hours corralling mini bards and struggling with a squealing sound system. I adjusted the stand for each speaker and put my arm around kids too afraid to speak into the mic. It was adorable chaos. Both breathtaking to watch, yet hardly watchable. In the looks of parents' eyes, I saw two dueling spirit: a buzzing bee, blown away by young wonderment, and a shit-talking slammer, cracking jokes about the culturally-rich kerfuffle on stage. It is evident that all of us need to pay more mind toward the potential of spoken word pedagogy in elementary classrooms. All of us: teachers, poets, researchers, administrators. We need more research and practice. We need to see

more potential in the Big Mikes out there, cussing on stage at a late open mic. Those raunchy rhymesters might just be the next Mr. B.

Typos are Humane

In which the poet: writes a hybrid narrative about co-constructing poems with strangers at Poetry On Demand.

1. WE ARE AT A HUMANITIES FESTIVAL ON A COLLEGE CAMPUS. Our tent is finally set up after tracking down organizers and locating folding chairs. Tony's typewriters are unboxed and on the table, along with a donation jar and display of our merchandise. A sign behind us reads "Poetry On Demand."

Tony Brewer begins his ritual. He loads a scrap sheet of paper into the typewriter and starts his morning writing pangrams.

> "The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog."

Pangrams are sentences that incorporate every letter of the alphabet. Tony has a selection of favorites, and likes to mix them up when warming up the typewriter.

> "Pack my box with five dozen liquor jugs."

Writing a pangram is a way for a typist to unstick every key, and test the ink ribbon on their machine. But it is also a way for a writer to unstick the clunky keys in their mind. It is a way to wake up the brain and prepare it for the test of an eight hour writing marathon.

> "Sphinx of black quartz, judge my vow."

Tony owns 37 vintage typewriters—he thinks—and has been booking our Poetry On Demand (POD) gigs for close to a decade. At every festival, fair, exhibit, bazaar, or special event, Tony and I talk about poetry, and what it means to compose poems with members of the public.

Tony sets out a stack of his business cards on the table. The cover is blank white, with a sentence that reads: "Typos Are Humane."

2. WE ARE AT A CRAFT FESTIVAL IN AN OLD FASHIONED MALL. And Tony and I are talking about punctuation. "Sometimes the punctuation clutters it up more than I like," he says, scanning one of his poems up and down. By contrast: I have started relying on punctuation more as I've grown older, but I sometimes don't use capitalization as often as Tony does.

There is a privilege in playing with words. In school, grammar is often taught with prescriptive rules (Orzulak, 2012), yet Tony and I are out in public having all sorts of fun. We're bending conventions. By breaking the rules we find new avenues to express ourselves.

"I tend to discard a lot of empty words," Tony says, explaining that he lets capital letters and line breaks do "all the heavy work" in lieu of punctuation. His style is evident in his poem "HOW THIS WORKS," which serves as a primer for new patrons to POD.

HOW THIS WORKS

I ask if you want
a poem you say yes
Give me a topic
maybe a form or word
Something you feel
In 10 - 15 minutes
I'll type one up
(there may be minor typos)
and read it to you
and give it to you
on a lovely card
You give me your reaction
and a small donation
and then leave
Then I do another one
for someone else

Tony tells me he was inspired by W.S. Merwin, who abandoned punctuation because we wanted to speak more urgently about global threats like nuclear stockpiling and The Vietnam War (Chiasson, 2017). When Merwin died in 2019, poet Edward Hirsh said the grounding of his verse had unexpected consequences. He said, "One of the most amazing things in this work is by the time he became a poet of old age he had sort of morphed into a poet of praise" (Adams, 2019).

Lately when I read Tony's uncluttered poems, I hum with the words. They are songs of praise.

3. WE ARE AT AN ARTS FAIR IN A DOWNTOWN SQUARE. And two college students are telling me about their new tattoos. "Fresh ink!" one woman says with arms extended. This weekend the two friends are getting matching tattoos of evergreen trees. They met at ten years old, and sometimes take road trips to Colorado—a place they feel their amity has grown the most. These lifelong friends decided to attend different colleges. One is visiting another today, and they think an evergreen will represent Colorado, and signify "old friendship with deep roots."

Matching Tattoos

A single, pristine,
evergreen. Old growth,
hard bark, limbs reaching

high, and deep roots
digging into the ground.
Sturdy, yet swaying in the wind.
Bountiful leaves, dripping dew,
like green fingerpaint in
an elementary school classroom.
Unbroken boughs, like the bond
of a Colorado friendship, like
ten year old girls, holding hands
while climbing toward the sky.
It's tattoo time, in two chairs,
side by side. Hold my hand, friend,
this will only hurt for one moment.

One friend posts the poem on Instagram. Part of her posts reads: "Now I can always have my best friend at my side."

Their bond is solidified. Sealed in ink.
Their love is a tattoo. A photograph. A poem.

4. WE ARE AT A FOOD FESTIVAL NEXT TO A LEMONADE STAND. And I ask Tony if he would ever go full-time. Has he ever thought about quitting his academic gig and hitting the road? Tony says right now that POD feels like giving gifts and receiving gifts in every conversation. He would hate to get to a point where it felt like he is the only one giving.

"I feel very playful asking if people want poems," he says

A mother walks up to Tony and asks him, "Do you know anything about bipolar disorder?" Tony takes out a pen and notebook and listens as best as he can.

5. WE ARE AT A BLUES FESTIVAL IN A PUBLIC PARK. And a woman approaches the booth wearing round glasses and a sunflower hat. She wants to tell me about a vision she has realized: the country's first slow food market. A reimagined space of community and cultivation.

She says a few years ago her life was uprooted. The soil she'd trusted in had turned toxic. It hurt to be plucked from the ground and replanted in a new plot. But now she knows the sun shines here also. This is a poem for celebration. Of slow growth reclaiming a forest floor and tree tops.

She tells me one struggle she faces is that people don't always know what "slow food" means. It means "sustainable." It means "accessible." It means "real food," she says with gritted teeth.

I write a poem for her called "Market Season," about the clarity that comes with reawakening.

When we say our food
is slow, what we mean
is intentional, deliberate,
a calculated hand sorting
salt from sand. Slow like roots
cutting through rock over
the course of years, slow like
a stalk unplucking itself from
the dirt and stretching East.
It is market season, and we've
flourished like an orchard of
fattening apple trees. We serve
everyone, with a slow shaking of
hands who know what it takes
to pick grit from fingernails.
When we say slow, we mean
meaningful: making food like
leaving a gig and a man behind you.
We are a talk on a slow walk
that blossomed into community,
of loving and forgiveness,
education, care and shared space.
Now Saturday is a day for awakening.

Poet Denise Levertov (1965) once spoke of the moment in the poetry writing process where the explored experience of the author is "brought to speech. She said, "The pressure of demand and the meditation on its elements culminate in a moment of vision, of crystallization" (p. 421).

Somewhere between conceptualization and crystallization, the poet has an "ah ha" moment.

The woman posts the poem on the farmer's market Instagram page. Part of her caption reads: "So perfectly describes what we're all about."

5. WE ARE AT A CULTURAL FAIR IN A SCHOOL GYMNASIUM. There are hundreds of fourth graders darting around the gym. Dozens of children swarm our booth, waiting their turn to clang on typewriter keys. One thing typewriters can teach children of the digital age is how to live with mistakes. One fourth grade girl walks away crying when she learns she cannot erase her error. "When that happens we say oops!" Tony always says this with his arms upturned.

i love youm
        oops
i lov e
        oops
i loveyou m om
        oops

Some kids become fixated. They see they need to strike the keys if they want the ink to stick. It's like they've come to an understanding that writing is more violent than they once thought.

Other kids spend twenty furious seconds uploading a storm onto the page. They smash their fingertips into the keys and make guttural sounds. On this day I find a piece of paper left behind.

> "j khwnrt ai xvalexi love my mombghjyfcxsaqwertuyv
> fghcjk
> xxxxxxxxxxxxx x x / lkjgfoodl tl t lrmr
> l,,, , jcasghsashamm bb lex
> al e x
> e
> ale bv

I imagine the author then stole away, losing their little fourth grader mind somewhere else in the gymnasium. I wonder what kind of questions they asked in English class later that day.

6. WE ARE AT A "FAMILY FRIENDLY" FAIR ON A SUNNY DAY. And Tony is staging some poetry readings next to the POD tent. Poets from all across the state are invited to share their work. Some are professionals. Some are dedicated open mic folk looking for a stage.

A member of the organizing committee is pointing her finger at Tony's chest. After she leaves, Tony tells me she believes there is a problem regarding "amplification." She says it's, "Too loud. Too vulgar. Too whatever." Think of the children, you know. Yada yada.

"Due to language issues in the past, the stage needed to be unplugged," is the message she leaves with Tony. He says he always tells the poets "family friendly," regardless how much he hates the term. But there is always some poet every festival who drops an "F-bomb" on the mic. Afterwards they always say, "Oh, I forgot that was in there," and it is never believable.

He says, "It's always a shackle to make everyone clean up their language, when everybody there is doing good work." He shrugs, "I don't proof anybody's stuff."

"This year the cussing act was the high school kids," Tony says. Their teachers and parents were sitting in the front row clapping for them.

Who are we to stifle their self-expression? Think of the children.

7.WE ARE AT AN OUTDOOR FESTIVAL ON A BUSY BAR STRIP. And Tony tells me he thinks it's interesting when people offer us alternative currencies for a poem.

“Sometimes I get paid in produce at the farmer’s market,” Tony says. One time I watched a guy try to pay Tony for a poem with the watch off his wrist.

Telling stories that pass the time: we call this “chopping it up.” It is another way to mix words in a bowl and create fresh utterances. This is the meaning of “Make it New”: a “historically recycled” adage that has been attributed to Ezra Pound and a dozen other artists (North, 2013).

A chef approaches me and asks me if I can write him something to put on his menu or the wall of his office. He says most of his job is creating unique flavors by mixing up small, oft-replicated processes. We are different artists speaking a shared language. I call the poem “Chopping It Up.”

> The world has gotten smaller
> to some people. There’s a lack
> of gas cash to cast out beyond.
> So people seek adventure
> in my dinner menu.
> “Let’s try the Alaskan crab
> with some French flare
> or do the noodles with
> a sweet Thai chili twist.
> Society may be changing
> but I still slice celery
> the exact same way--
> identical ingredients
> as yesterday’s meal.
> I’m just chopping it up,
> making it new, mixing flavors
> into something fresh.
> My knives are sharpened
> through replicated strokes,
> and now I decide
> how to carve the day anew.

The man tips us fifty dollars and says he will be right back. He comes back with a stack of Solo cups and a growler of craft cold beer. “I had to get you guys a round,” he says, like we just got off the dishline. High fiving after a hustle of an evening.

Each of us look to the left side of the street. And then we look to the right.

8. WE ARE AT A FOOD TRUCK FESTIVAL NEXT TO A CANDIED APPLE STAND. When an old man approaches Tony with a sneer on his face. A strange fact: some strangers approach us aggressively. They’re like “how dare they!” Then they usually try to waste our time.

“Would you like a poem,” Tony asks the man. The man rattles off a theme like he’s trying to stump Tony or something.

“The one who got away,” the man blurts out, before leaving our line of sight.

Instead of writing an obvious poem—of a love interest that escaped the author’s grasp—Tony decides he wants to write a dramatic poem about catching fish. The poem is peppered with suggestive phrases, but really, the poem is about catching a fish.

THE ANGLER’S LAMENT

My bait was not perfection
but still tempting to her
dangling in refracted light
just below the surface
like entendre & innuendo
Her bubbles tiny kisses
floating in my shallows
Suddenly! -- no, she’s off
the hook -- and away
but wait! -- I feel the tug
still
like a phantom limb lost
like a dead limb lost
full of old hooks & lures
I pull -- stuck
pull & wrangle -- old bait
lost on the bottom of a body
& I will spend
way too long
trying to get free

Tony Brewer: the unstumpable.

The man never comes back to collect his poem. So Tony posts it to his Instagram. He includes the hashtag: #theonewhogotaway

9. WE ARE OUTSIDE AN ART GALLERY ON A STREET CORNER. A woman asks me if I will write a poem about the moment her life changed. She was at a rock bottom point, and was traveling overseas. She says when she stepped into St. Paul’s Cathedral in London, a new light lifted within her. She says she became fixated on all the “tiny details” of the ceiling, and it helped her to appreciate the little rough pieces in her life that she needed to take a chisel to.

Stopping Into St Paul

Was a gasp at the waters surface.
I was a wretch, dripping wet
and shivering like some scripture.

A shambled life of turned out pockets
and tuned out people, and now
it's all order and architecture.

I was stunned by the intricacy,
that divinity is built
with tiny details. I marveled
at a universe built in brush strokes
and chisels and chipped stone.

A fog lifted in my life,
and all I needed was
a careful look at the ceiling,
swirling circles,
such awesome design.

I stopped into a new space.
It was more welcoming
than I expected.

A longstanding debate among writers is the perceived nature of "clarity" and "obscurity" in poetry (Birkerts, 2008; Mlinko, 2007). While poets typically don't aim for their poems to be obscure, many do aim to include "moments of wilderness" (Kunitz, 1974).

I don't want my poems to help people find clarity.
I want my poems to help people stumble out from the wilderness.

10. WE ARE SITTING AT A TYPEWRITER WITH A BLANK SHEET OF PAPER. And a young woman asks Tony to write her a poem about empowerment.

Empowerment is arguably the most important word in the English language. Absent of context: it is a word that means absolutely nothing.

These are the moments that Tony says he has to do some "mental jujitsu."

He has to write the poem that he wants.
But he also has to write the poem he thinks she thinks she wants.

GET TO WORK

The way the world works
is you do something
and it hurts or it helps
If it hurts you quit it
but if it helps
you seek out times
& places where you can
do that thing over & over
to the point it ceases
to be just ‘some thing’
but the thing - the only thing
that matters - not an obsession
but a passion
an avocation to be
helped the way you
make others feel loved

POD: the thing we seek out. Over and over. Sometimes we hope to make others feel loved, but truthfully, the only thing we know is how to tell ourselves we are loved.

The woman posts Tony’s poem on her Instagram. She includes the hashtag: #empowerment.

On Culture and Costumes

In which the poet: remixes an interview transcript, a poem, and a social media post, to craft an autoethnographic narrative about cultural appropriation at poetry events.

It was once custom for the host of the haiku deathmatch to wear a traditional kimono and white and red hachimaki headband. My hachimaki was custom made, and had the Japanese characters for "word warrior" painted on the front. The deathmatch follows the head-to-head style of Matsuo Bashō's "Seashell Game," a haiku battle first played in 1672 in Edo era Japan (Hamill, 2004). The first "Head to Head Haiku" match at the National Poetry Slam took place in Ann Arbor in 1995, and was hosted by Daniel Ferri (2000). The tradition was carried on by other poets like Bob Moyer and Kirk Hardesty, who hosted matches at the Southern Fried Poetry Slam. My tutelage was under Tazuo Yamaguchi, who taught me how to facilitate a match and count the scores. Tazuo wore sleek, shiny kimonos with blazing dragons and snarling tigers. We often spoke in short utterances and grunts, made popular by "old master" TV tropes, like Pai Mei and Mr. Miyagi. We karate chopped the air and made sound effects and shouted Banzai at the crowd.

Then one day the younger poets let us know that this tradition was not cool. Kimonos have significant cultural meaning, and aren't some costume to put on for kicks (Friedman, 2019). I felt emboldened by the few Japanese poets I knew who participated in the deathmatch. I felt like I had a right to lampoon Japanese customs because my expatriate uncle used to send me koala cookies and green tea candy in the mail. Though I was defensive at first, and unwilling to shift, I finally acquiesced that the young artists were probably right. After all, aren't the young artists always right? At the 2016 Southern Fried Poetry Slam, I announced onstage that I would no longer wear "traditional dress" while hosting the haiku deathmatch. When some folks applauded, I both challenged and welcomed the audience to help me rethink the cultural practices of the deathmatch. How can we maintain our reverence for Japanese art and literature, while taking audit of the ways we've appropriated Japanese culture?

I believe that the spoken word movement is the most diverse cultural arts movement in the history of the world. I have no source to back up this claim, but I'll pay twenty bucks to anyone who can find an exception. One characteristic of spoken word that is unique to poetry is the added presence of a body (Ingalls, 2012). Visible markers like gender, race, and disability become inherent subjects of each poem, which are emphasized through gesticulation and posture. It would behoove stakeholders of the spoken word community to consider the politic of the poet body (Fox, 2010). I thought an examination of embodiment may be an important place to focus. Young poets weren't challenging deathmatch hosts for disrespecting Japanese words. Young poets were challenging deathmatch hosts for disrespecting human bodies.

Fetishization of the body is not unique to the deathmatch. I am reminded of a social media post from my colleague, poet Too Black. A local organization had booked him to perform at the city's arts garden, and the event flyer featured a headshot of the poet wearing a hoodie and a stern expression on his face. The caption below his photo bills him as a "Provocative spoken word poet." Too Black used Photoshop to cross out the word "provocative" and he wrote in the margin, "We really don't know what to call him." He added a shrug emoji and posted it to social media, fulfilling his contractual obligation to share the flyer. "I took my own creative license," he said laughing. Too Black told me in an interview that the organization tried to reach out later, via Twitter. He described their effort to intervene as "racially clumsy," borrowing a term from filmmaker Jordan Peele (Tucker, 2018). Too Black jokingly called himself the "diversity poster child" for the organization, which is fitting, because his body is literally featured on their posters. "Black artists are provocative," he said, explaining where he took offense. "We can't be taken seriously as intellectuals or thinkers." Too Black felt the image of his body had been appropriated by a neoliberal institution to promote an agenda of what he called "mindless

inclusivity." He said it is important to consider what the poster says to its intended audience: "If you want to be shocked and want to feel bad about being white come listen to this guy."

An important distinction should be made about using poetry as a vehicle for cultural discussion. Ragan Fox stated that poetry events serve to both "archive" and "dramatize" the experiences of marginalized authors (Fox, 2010). The poet and academic shared an example of visiting a college campus in the Ozarks, where he stumbled upon the message "RAGAN FOX IS QUEER" scrawled in chalk on the sidewalk. Fox described the moment as triggering, and he recalled the times he heard the phrase uttered by bullies in school. He later realized that the graffiti was a promotional message. As he explained, "The host of the Arkansas event thought 'RAGAN FOX IS QUEER!' would be a provocative way to draw a crowd for my performance" (Fox, 2010, p. 421). While there may have been the intent of empowerment, this dramatization served to fetishize the body of a poet, and framed his trauma as a vehicle for entertainment.

The "provocative" poster dramatized the identity of Too Black, but in my time working as an organizer I have also witnessed behavior that seeks to erase his body. One interesting observation is that some white collaborators struggle to say his name: Too Black. Some people stumble over the word "black," and I have heard others say the word "black" with a quieter volume. For some white organizers, his stage name "Too Black" is less palatable than his "government name," which alludes to the purpose of the name to begin with. Too Black's friction with institutions often relates to their negotiation with art that is deemed "Too Black" for their sanctioned literary space. We often joke that institutional stakeholders want him to perform Blackness in a way that is appetizing to a white audience. They want him to be Black. Just not, "Too Black."

I once attended one of Too Black's performances at an art gallery. He had been commissioned to collaborate with an artist, who would create a visual representation of his poem "Blood Splatter." In front of a mostly white audience, Too Black began his poem on stage:

> Let's paint the world in blood splatter
> Let's lather it
> in imperialistic lavishness
> Let's paint red, white, and blue stripes on the backs on these savage Africans
> Let's use them as manikins for our empty canvases
>
> Let's strip them
> Whip them
> 3/5s them
> Bomb them
> Afrikaan them

The poem lambasts a dominant culture of colonization and vampiric consumption of Black stories, an appropriate message for the audience. Too Black later told me that his poetry is hypercritical of white supremacist institutions, so he is skeptical when they give him money. The commissioned visual art for "Blood Splatter" was a wall of graffitied words like "passion" and "voice." "Race relations and harmony bullshit," Too Black said, shaking his head at the safe, sanitized message on the wall. The photographer hired by the gallery started snapping photos of Too Black in front of the mural. "C'mon, smile!" the photographer pleaded with him. "Give us a smile! C'mon, big smile for the camera!"

Too Black, the self-professed "diversity poster child," stared straight ahead as the camera flashed its white light over and over. He did not smile.

Sound Off

In which the poet: writes a prose poem about embodiment and hearing loss.

Sometimes when people are speaking to me, I can only hear their words as a numb rubbing against my temples. Sentences, sometimes, are reduced to the hard hisses of "esses" and "cees" and the puh-puh-pop of "p" and "b" sounds, or the slight upward lift of teeth and tongue asking a question. Sometimes I smile and nod, hoping what they are saying is something worth smiling and nodding over. Sometimes I bob my head like a banger-of-a-track is playing because I am scared to say in the moment that I cannot hear. Sometimes when I'm on stage, speaking a poem of my own, I'll hear a crackle to my left shoulder, like the release of obstructed steam, and then muffled notes like a directional microphone is being smothered by someone folding it within a dirty dish towel. There's the feeling of shifting liquid in my ear, and pressure like a tuft wad of bubble gum tucked in the back of my cheek. Noise gets swallowed like a gulp underwater in that instance, and I hear the same distant tone that movies show when a soldier's helmet has been shell-shocked by a flashbang. Sounds will inevitably sift slowly back into my canals, but only after weeks of feeling the cold sting of ear medicine and the way q-tips make me cough and tongue the bottom of my jaw. Though I am a poet, I have never written about my hearing loss before. The way that oral/aural utterances fade in and out of focus in my life has given me a unique relationship to language and music. Perhaps it is why I fell in love with rap and spoken word, because even the times I can only hear the lyrics as blurred notes within the beat, the thumping of the break against the rate of the measure means me and my scarred drums can stay on track. One of the masters of snatching a break of a soulful song and extending it to something you can dance to is Grandmaster Flash (Serrano, 2015). Flash was known as a tinkerer decades before anyone had even come up with a name for maker culture (Walter-Herrmann & Büching, 2014). In Chang's description of the late-70's Kool Herc house parties that would eventually impel the hip hop movement in the Bronx, Flash is the high school wunderkind down the hall ripping up old stereo speakers and busted mixers he found tossed out in the street. "Back in his room with his screwdriver, soldering iron and insatiable curiosity, the kid who would be named Grandmaster Flash was theorizing the turntable and the mixer, pondering the presentation of the party, trying to figure out how to turn beat-making and crowd-rocking into a science" (Chang, 2005, p. 112). One of the ways Flash would change hip hop forever is developing the use of the crossfader in turntablism. Katz (2012) explained, "Using the crossfader, the DJ can switch smoothly between turntables without interrupting the flow of the music" (p. 54). In the documentary Scratch (2001), DJ QBert demonstrated that the cross fader is like an "on and off" switch, fading sound from right to left record. Using the fader to "cut" and "cue" sound (Katz, 2012), QBert said of the noise manipulation tool, "It's kind of like talking, you know. Just speak what you are saying. It's like each technique is a word. It's like a larger unit of vocabulary that you can speak." I mention this now because sometimes when I'm talking to a friend in a loud café, their words will fade in and out from ear to ear, like my brain is a turntable and the records on each side of my head are playing at different decibels. Or when I'm listening to music in autumn with a stuffed up left ear, the crossfader switches from song to silence like one of the

turntable spindles is not spinning. Or when I'm speaking a poem, and my only way of hearing my voice is by honing in on the humming in my throat. When I read poetry while my ears aren't working, the words seem to be remixed through my entire body. I hear the poem with my hands, the way they whip through the air synching with the upbeats. I see the lengths of the lines by touching my chest to feel how much breath I have left before the next gasp. When I can't hear I sometimes speak too loud, like there's a faulty volume knob on my face, but too loud has never been a problem when I say a poem onstage. There is another dissonant poem that I hear within.

T(h)eam Three: "Emotion"

Speaking to her sense of discovery in poetry writing, Audre Lorde (1984) said of her process, "I would recite a poem, and somewhere in that poem would be the feeling, the vital piece of information. It might be a line. It might be an image. The poem was my response" (p. 82). Lorde's comments suggest that she metaphysically places herself within the poem and attunes herself to her surroundings through her feelings. Brady (2009) claimed that poetic inquiry is a "sensuous scholarship," clarifying to all slammers that when we say "we are *about* that work," what we should be saying is that "we are *within* that work":

> Poets do not report their collected facts in a manner typical of the social sciences. Instead of writing or talking through abstract concepts *about* their research without ever immersing deeply in the culturally-constructed worlds of the people they study, as one might proceed in writing or applying scientific theory, poets write *in* and *with* the facts and frameworks of what they see in themselves in relations to Others, in particular landscapes, emotional and social situations (p. xvi)

When a slammer steps up to the microphone, often someone in the audience will shout "Go *in,* poet!" Hip hop artist and poet Jonathan Brown (2013), however, asked, "My question is where does the poet go when the poet goes in? Where is in?" This question is essential to the poet because rather than using a telescope to search for life on shore, our act of immersing oneself and swimming with clutched lungs is our way of finding one another. As poet Andrea Gibson (2005) famously quipped, "The only way to survive / is to breathe deep and dive." Brown (2013) presents a similar metaphor of digging for groundwater to personify the paradox of poets representing universal truths by digging into their unique experiences; no matter where we are in the world, if we dig in our own way we will find the water that universally sustains us.

Galvin and Todres (2009) referred to this digging as "embodied interpretation," explaining that poetic inquiry is the process of interpreting what pulls "back and forth between language and the felt sense of the text carried in our bodies" (p. 308). When a poet goes *in*, their process of internalization strengthens the standpoints of listeners through a sense of connectivity

that is more empathetic than intellectualized. Shidmehr (2009) explained that "while inquiring poetically, "the researcher embodies inquiring as an activity," (p. 101) which suggests that social science researchers have the ability to *go in* as well. Rath (2001) claimed when she uses poetic forms to craft transcription data, "I do something with data, rather than saying something about it" (p. 117).

When considering the t(h)eam of *emotion*, it is important to understand that the associated harms are not limited to hurt feelings, but speak to our greater challenge of holistically supporting the mental health and wellbeing of all people involved with literacy and arts education. The first challenge to consider is that while spoken word and hip hop pedagogy has proven to be a reliable vehicle for fostering conversations about mental illness and neurodiversity, institutions have struggled to meet said dialogue with sustainable programming and resources to help those most in need of services like counseling, drug treatment, etc. Levy (2012) highlighted the potential that hip hop and spoken word literacies have therapeutically for school communities. Poetry has the capability to enrich our perspectives of preexisting narratives people may have by calling attention to tenderness through the exploration of one's own "frailties" (Desai, 2016). Spoken word is ideal for radical educators because such recontextualizing of humanity subverts patriarchal structures and the dominant narratives promoted by a culture that condones toxic misogyny and white supremacy.

Second, an often underdiscussed topic is the "emotional labor" (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002) that artists and educators must endure when building sustainable literacy programming. Spoken word is often used as an organizational tool, because as a participant in Clay's (2006) study plainly stated, hip hop "gets people hyped up" (p. 113). This statement provides hints into the explosive energy that poets evoke in spoken word performances. The emotional burden isn't solely felt by teaching artists in a modeling role; Weinstein and West (2012) suggested that

young authors can carry a very real burden with them when they believe they're writer identities make them ambassadors for an ethnicity or culture. Many descriptions of poetry slams and open mics provide hints to the expulsion of energy that goes into such performances (Fiore, 2015). In this dissertation I aimed to examine the inevitable burnout that comes with "spitting fire."

The first chapter of the *emotion* t(h)eam, "On Staging Trauma" explores the use of poetry as a form of trauma-informed care, and considers the staging and scoring or youth adversity in public settings. The second chapter, "Henry Clerval Scolding Victor Frankenstein" is a hybrid narrative about the importance of maintaining "self-care" for graduate students. The third chapter, "It Be Like That Sometimes" is a confessional of failure about implementing literacy programming at an alternative high school. The final chapter, "Mother Bears, Our Golden Shovel" is a poem about taking a "brain break" and grabbing a drink at a bar near campus.

On Staging Trauma

In which the poet: remixes two poems, and audio transcripts from one focus group and one interview, to write a prose poem about the staging of student trauma in youth poetry slam.

I am standing on stage in a high school auditorium with two teenage poets. One student, an eighteen-year-old male I'll call Heath, is debating whether he wants to take the microphone out of the mic stand during his performance. I tell him one thing to consider is that he'll lose the ability to gesture with the hand that holds the mic. His poem is about a school shooting, so he decides to take the mic out, so he can imitate a gunman stalking the front of a classroom. I remind him that he needs to be deliberate with his steps or the choreography will look sloppy. Chest heaving, heavy breathing, Heath screams into the microphone:

> Let me ask you this…
> If a child snaps and no one is around to hear it
> Does the child make a sound
> What if people are around to hear it but no one chooses to listen
> My mom will go casket shopping, we don't have a lot of money
> So normally funeral debt and procession
> A mother's heart shattered into pieces just like a mirror busted
> A family looking to the mirror busted as a window seeing what they used to be
> As the child has to hide in the bathroom, texting their mother
> Mom, I'm so glad we went with this phone plan
> The reception is the best I have ever had

"I am a very paranoid person," he tells me later in a focus group. "So sometimes when I come to school I wonder whether I am going to die or not. Especially with the times we live in." Heath tells me his poem was inspired by a PSA that framed a school shooting as a back-to-school shopping ad (Hsu, 2019). The poem also mentions a recent story of a football coach who stopped a standoff in an Oregon high school by embracing the student with a hug (Knowles, 2019).

Though Heath says the topic of school shooting peaks his chronic anxiety, he claims he wrote it for more altruistic reasons. "This poem is made to bring awareness. It feels like students don't have that voice. No offense to adults, but a lot of students feel like their opinion *does not* matter." He says that it is important that young people hear that their opinions matter. "I want to help be that voice" he tells me. He says that for kids his age, death has been an educational experience.

The 2011/2012 National Survey of Children's Health found that "roughly half of American school children have experienced at least some form of trauma—from neglect, to abuse, to violence" (Lander, 2018). Heath had started staging his catharsis at his school's poetry slams after his sister died from cancer. "Before I started poetry I didn't feel like I had a voice. I didn't have a way to talk out my feelings." Heath is a male student who lives in a Rural school, and he says poetry provides an avenue for emotional expression he doesn't usually experience. He says,

"A lot of people around here think, 'Oh, you're a guy. You can't cry. You can't have feelings.'" Heath ends his performance onstage by ripping up the poem and throwing the pieces in the air.

I was invited to emcee the school's annual poetry slam by the sponsoring English teacher. I agreed to volunteer my time and drive 90 minutes to the small town. I also offered to help students rehearse their poem in the auditorium before the after-school performance. Many teen writers are unfamiliar with the mechanics of working with a standing microphone. One teen poet I'll call Melanie holds the stand like a withered flower whose petals might break off the stem. I show her how to adjust the height of the stand to point the microphone closer to her chin. "I always enjoyed writing," she tells me later in a focus group. "I just didn't share it with anybody." Despite both having stage fright, Melanie and Heath started competing in slams after they were encouraged by their teacher. She describes "feeling so powerful" the first time she performed.

While Heath says he wrote his poem for others, Melanie says, "When I write them they are for me." Both contend their poems simultaneously serve the author and audience. Melanie says of her poems, "When I share them it is for other people." She says others may learn from the staging of her personal testimonies. "You never know who else is going through this." Students at the high school slam share both interpersonal and intrapersonal stories, because poetry can serve as a vehicle to explore both "inner" and "outer" states of being (Cotter, 1981). She says "there's more that can be said in a poem than a story. More emotions can be conveyed."

In the middle of our focus group, Heath starts having a panic attack. His eyes are fixed straight forward, his eyes dilating like spilled motor oil in a pan. Melanie and I give him time to collect his thoughts. He collects his speech, and says poetry is a way to disguise painful experiences. Though Heath and Melanie both suffer from chronic anxiety they will be staging their testimonies on stage in front of their friends, teachers, administrators, and parents. Melanie says of metaphors, "It's kind of like putting a veil on something. So if people cared enough to actually go deep and look into what you're saying, they'll understand it." She says peers and adults who don't care to investigate the poem will just see the parts of the story that sit on the surface.

To prepare for the slam Melanie rehearses her poem "Kintsukuroi Heart." DeSilvey and Ryan (2018) defined Kintsukuroi as "the Japanese art of repairing cracks in broken pottery with gold, silver or platinum lacquer" (p. 195). They add that "it also expresses the idea that breaking and mending can be an important part of the life of an object, adding to its beauty and meaning."

> Once upon a time,
> There was a girl
> With ocean eyes
> And sunshine hair
>
> Her skin as smooth as porcelain
> And a heart just as fragile

When she was young and naive,
She believed love was everywhere
In the air we breathe
And the words we speak

Yet as she grew,
She learned that love cannot be trusted

Melanie says her poem is about a "toxic relationship" she was in a few years ago. Writing the poem was a way for her to speak about the experience without providing explicit details about her personal life. She says, "I never got the chance to fully mend, until people started believing me and my side of the story. It's about me trying to put myself back together again." Melanie says for a long time she was "very shy" and "kind of a follower." She says writing poetry helped her to find a middle space, where she can stand on her own—without leading or following.

I had the opportunity to interview five students who participated in the slam, split into two focus groups. Every student wrote about depression and anxiety being a prevalent part of their life. In a separate interview, I ask their teacher if she is surprised to hear that. I'll call her Mrs. Valor.

"No," she says plainly. She says that many families in Rural committees come from a culture of "shake it off." She says that some students are told by friends and families "it's emasculating for them to be poetic," and that emotions are something to "block out." She says there are also barriers to implementing opportunities for socio-emotional learning in her classroom. She says if she spent just five minutes a week nurturing the writing of her students, she would add twelve hours to her work schedule. The poetry slam covers a lot of ground in the span of an afternoon.

She says assessment is one of the hardest parts of implementing creative writing lessons. If a program can't be measured through a test score, she says administrators might not value "something exploratory." She contends that special events like slams build trust between teachers, administrators, students, and parents. It's a chance for stakeholders of schools to be "there for the right reasons." I posit that slam is a false assessment. The measurement is a gimmick to encourage engagement. "The points are not the point," Allan Wolf once said. "The point is poetry (Abbott, 2008). Mrs. Valor replies that slam is an "assessment of gumption." She says, "it takes some actual nerve to get up there." I ask her why gumption is an important skill to practice in the classroom setting. "Gumption is what can get you into the place where you want to be, rather than the place you just flow to." She says gumption is the key for kids who "feel stuck" who want to break out of the mold they've been cast in. She says, "It takes guts and gumption to pursue something that is yours, rather than something that is handed to you."

A growing number of educators and artists question the practice of judging and scoring performance art that increasingly personifies trauma and adversity. An article in the Chicago Defender provided important questions for sponsors of youth poetry slams to ask themselves:

> Are poets only writing about trauma to score points, and if so, does that take something away from the craft? When we start asking that question, we begin to lose sight of the fact that the poets' stories are true and their trauma is real. When we consider the larger context in which these poems are being written, we must acknowledge how rarely the experiences of our most vulnerable populations are treated with dignity (Chicago Defender, 2017, p. 9).

At the end of the school day dozens of parents, students, teachers, and administrators file into the auditorium. Three teachers and two students are recruited to serve as judges, and sit at the scoring table with their marker and white board. Mrs. Valor believes it is important for adults to attend youth poetry events. "You have to experience the thing," she says. "Because the kids can talk about it all day. But until they're immersed in it—with their kids—they don't get it." She claims when parents value the outcomes of public events, this provides incentives for administrators to support initiatives. She adds, "if funding is necessary they'll be more likely to back you up." She also stresses it is important to involve community stakeholders from outside the school. Though I was volunteering my time that day, I developed a relationship with this learning community because a local librarian started writing grants for her literacy programming. Together: a teacher; a teaching artist; a librarian; a principal; some parents; and a dozen students kicked off their second annual slam. Make no mistake: Mrs. Valor is in the middle.

Students in the slam assure me that we don't need to "shield them" or treat them like they are "fragile." Regardless, there are some important risks for educators to consider when staging a slam. Though she is hesitant to censor student work, she says there is a risk for students to stage their trauma in front of parents and administrators. In regards to principals, Mrs. Valor says, "At the end of the day they have to answer to parents. And especially if parents are at the giving end of some of that trauma, then that can come back to hurt everyone. Because we are here to serve the constituents." Teachers should encourage students to make "smart choices" with testimonies, if their testimonies may put them further at risk of bullying or abuse from peers or parents.

There are also risks for teachers who use spoken word as trauma-informed care. Research shows an interrelatedness between students and teachers, meaning teachers are also traumatized when their students face abuse (Minero, 2017). Perlman and Saakvitne (1995) provide the term "vicarious trauma," which refers to the transference that can occur when people hear "trauma stories and become witnesses to the pain, fear, and terror that trauma survivors have endured" (Newell & MacNeil, 2010). I take it upon myself to check up on Mrs. Valor a few times a month. So far we've planned to go to a heavy metal concert, but we haven't made it work yet.

Roughly a dozen teens perform their original work at the slam, in front of the applause of parents, peers, and the people who teach them. At the end of the show, while I am stacking folding chairs, a parent comes over to introduce herself. She tells me her husband recently died, and that her daughter in the slam has taken to poetry as a way to find direction in a confusing

time. She takes a stack of papers out of her purse. “You know, I wrote some poems about my late husband too,” she tells me. “Would you be willing to hear them?” I stand and receive her confession of grief into my body as best as I can. I listen. I stand as witness.

Henry Clerval Scolding Victor Frankenstein

In which the poet: uses Mary Shelley's monstrous novel to write a "cut up" poem about the mental health needs of graduate students (plus a reluctantly tacked on epilogue and conclusion).

I: A Word of Friendly Warning

The 1931 Universal film Frankenstein begins on an expository note with a "word of friendly warning." Actor Edward Van Sloan steps from behind a curtain and, in an unconventional move, addresses the audience directly. He warns the audience they are about to see a portrayal of a scientist testing the will of God by bringing a dead body back to life. His speech concludes:

> I think it may thrill you. It may shock you. It may even horrify you. So if any of you feel that you do not care to subject your nerves to such a strain, now is your chance to… Well, we've warned you (1931).

The scene is a last-minute addition on the part of producers who feared church leaders and censors would find the content of the film objectionable. Though the scene was added, *Frankenstein* would become one of the most heavily censored films of the era, with dozens of iterations of the films existing as regional censors around the world cut bits and pieces (Skal, 1993). The addition of Van Sloan's address follows a prevailing trope in *Frankenstein* mythos: a move to disrupt the audience's experience, and warn them they are headed someplace ghastly. In most versions of the story, friends and family stage varying interventions in the life of the young student Frankenstein, urging him to preserve his health and wellbeing over his pursuit of study. As a young researcher with bipolar disorder, feeling worn and ragged near the end of graduate school, it was hard not to see myself in Frankenstein. As more of my friends started to interrogate me about my own stress, and sleep health, and alcohol consumption, I realized that I should take the "friendly warnings" of my colleagues more seriously. Perhaps I could reflect on the lessons Frankenstein refused to learn.

As I have prepared this chapter, I wrestled with whether I should include an introduction that provides some theoretical context and necessary background information. However, a precedent exists for *Frankenstein*. James Whale's sequel, *Bride of Frankenstein* also included an introductory scene, and several authors have included prefaces to the published versions of the novel, including Mary Shelley's husband Percy Shelley, her father William Godwin, and Mary Shelley herself.

A word of friendly warning: the primary content of this article is an autoethnographic poem (Prendergast, 2008) that I wrote during the 200th anniversary celebration of the publication of *Frankenstein* (Baumann, 2018). In contemporary mythos, Frankenstein is an accomplished degree-holding scientist who builds a creature in a large, pristine laboratory. In the original 1818 text, however, Frankenstein is an undergraduate student, who reanimates a dead body in his dormitory room. He is not the strikingly handsome Colin Clive or Peter Cushing, with a pressed dress shirt and loosened collar. He is described as haggard and falling apart, more like the face I saw in the mirror during the final weeks of my qualifying exams. That face startled me.

In chapter 12 of *Frankenstein*, the creature stares into a pool of water and realizes for the first time that he is wretched. That is an apt metaphor to consider when reading the poem in this article, which was created through a creative analytic practice (Richardson, 1999) called "erasure." Stone (2017) explains, "Also known as blackout or redaction poetry, this is a type of poetry created from the substrate material of an existing text. Obscure many of the words, these poems command, and you will find the sentences that have been there all along" (p. 2) Mimicking the creature's stare into the pool, I attempted to search for myself by looking at Victor Frankenstein, using erasure on the 1818 text to pluck out Mary Shelley's descriptions of the fledgling researcher. Frankenstein insistently ignores warnings from professors and peers about his self-destructive approach to study, and the fractured nature of the text signifies the

increasing fractures in his mental health and relationships with others. Young (2008) reminded us that dissection and amalgamation are major motifs in *Frankenstein*. I used fragments of Mary Shelley's text and stitched them together to form a new narrative, which will shed some light on the metaphorical daemons that plague young academics in their quest for skill and mastery. By isolating and rearranging Mary Shelley's descriptions of Frankenstein's self-destructive behavior, my peers and I can also reflect on our own unhealthy relationships with things like anxiety, insomnia, depression, alcohol dependency, and even suicidal ideation.

Frankenstein's lone friend Henry Clerval is a poet who consistently intervenes and urges Victor to stop isolating himself in his research process. I could hear the voice of my friends in Clerval who all intervened in various ways during my PhD. It seems fitting to author this poem in the voice of Henry Clerval. My friends intervened because they were scared for me, so in turn, I wrote a poem that scares me. Now, as I write this preface on Halloween week of 2019, I share this fear with the greater research community. This poem may also encourage you to stare into your own reflective pool. I think it may thrill you. It may shock you. It may even horrify you.

<u>II. The Body</u>

A Grad School Friend Chastises Me About Self Care, and Sounds like Henry Clerval Scolding Victor Frankenstein

Beloved Friend,

Seeing that sleep has fled your eyes,
I'll assume you've returned to old habits.
You fancy yourself a scientist, but I impress
you've only succeeded in discovering fatigue.[1]

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[1] A study in the United Arab Emirates found that 67% percent of university students "suffer from sleep disturbances and poor sleep quality" (Afandi et al., 2013), which correlates with numbers found in studies conducted in the United States and Taiwan. There are over 30 references to sleep in *Frankenstein*, and Victor speaks of experiencing insomnia, chronic fatigue, and dream anxiety disorder. One of the most notable passages of the book reads: "Sleep fled from my eyes; I wandered like an evil spirit." I sometimes joke with my friend that I can sleep when I am dead.

With how very ill you appear, it seems you've
employed every art to destroy yourself.[2]

While we may be unfashioned creatures,
our default need not be weak and faulty.[3]

You've absented yourself from all you love,
dear cousin, consumed in your sick room,[4]
burdening your brain with exploded systems
and useless names; the great ancient.
That sad trash as your father says.

You study structures of the human frame
yet you shun the face of man. Friend, you act
as if writing us back is the most abhorred task.[5]

With knowledge: you wish to overtake winds
and somehow unveil the very face of nature.
To a poet, these are the ravings of insanity.
You've become the author of unalterable evils.

I urge you, hear my deep and voiceless grief:
Banish dark passions. Quit this filthy process.
Say with lips livid with the hue of death you

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[2] Research in Iran, the UK, and the United States shows that university students have a high prevalence of substance abuse (Jalilian et al., 2015), with "tension" cited as a common reason for students to use drugs and alcohol. In *Frankenstein*, Victor takes an opiate called laudanum to help him stave off paranoia enough to sleep. Victor rationalizes his increased dosage, arguing that "it was by means of this drug only that I was enabled to gain the rest necessary for the preservation of life." I tell my friend the same about my own ways of self-medicating: each dosage is just a "small quanity" to help me kickstart my sleep.

[3] Studies in the United States and Korea show a correlation between depression, anxiety, and the decision for students to "self-isolate" (Chow et al., 2017). These studies suggest that as digital culture becomes more prevalent in university settings, student mental health challenges will continue to grow on campuses and necessitate the need to hire staff with understandings of the shifting digital landscape. Technology becomes an excuse for Victor to isolate himself in *Frankenstein*, and he argues why he must keep his experiments secret because he "will not lead you on, unguarded and ardent as I then was, to your destruction and infallible misery." I tell my friends I'm limiting my screen time, and that I'm not spending as much time on social media as it seems.

[4] A study in the United States shows that college students with chronic illnesses show a higher prevalence of "depressive and anxious symptomology," (Mullins et al., 2017) suggesting that a student's physical illness may be a significant predictor of symptoms of mental illness. In *Frankenstein*, Victor's experiences of grief gravely impact his body, resulting in symptoms described as fainting, chronic fatigue, comatose sleep, hysteria and convulsions. One recollection reads, "I lay for two months on the point of death; my ravings, as I afterwards heard, were frightful." I try to convince my friend that the reason I drink daily is to numb the aches enough to keep going.

[5] Research shows that international students face an increased risk of isolation, (Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). A Swiss scientist, Victor himself is an international student in *Frankenstein*, studying at a Bavarian university called Ingolstadt. He describes the journey there as "long and fatiguing," and finds himself at odds with the values of many of his professors. I take the opportunity to use statistics to dismiss the concerns of my friends, saying that I have local supports than some international students don't have in our department.

refuse to walk through life a restless specter.

I've seen the way you stare into the silent lake,
eyeing the pool, an unexplored ocean of truth.
As if your existence is a blot upon the earth.[6]

I cannot support the horror of that countenance, Victor.
I will not be a hapless victim of your unhallowed arts.

The construction of our souls is not so strange.
No deranged mechanism is needed to spark being.

To restore life, you must hasten to seek out the sun.[7]
Behold its rise and recommence a new day, say
What it is to live, your body free of demons.

You need not feel the fangs of remorse,
fair student, or forcefully glut
your carriage with the maw of death.

Your Friend Until Death,
Henry Clerval

III. "For this I had deprived myself of rest and health."

It was not my initial plan to provide an epilogue, because I hoped the Gothic images of my poem were haunting enough to stick with the reader. After receiving suggestions to conclude this article with a short reflection, I acquiesced, since a precedent for providing an epilogue also

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[6] Research shows that suicide is the second leading cause of death for college students in the United States, and studies suggest that experiences of suicidal ideation are disproportionally higher for students who are racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities (Shadick, Dagirmanjian & Barbot, 2015). Victor contemplates suicide by drowning in *Frankenstein*, saying he hopes "the waters might close over me and my calamities forever." Sometimes I joke with friends that if I kill myself I won't have to finish my dissertation.

[7] A study of 98 campuses in the United States found that many university Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) are "failing to keep up with a troubling spike in demand for mental healthcare," with some schools listing wait times of two-to-three weeks (Thielking, 2017). A related survey found that large campuses in the United States host "an average of one licensed mental health provider per 3,500 students." Though *Frankenstein* has been used as a cautionary tale for 200 years, most schools still lack adequate support to meet the needs of students fleeing their daemons. For years I used facts about systems as excuses to not get help for my own issues, but the interventions of my friends eventually disrupted this pattern. Finally, I headed the friendly warnings: I promised to reconfigure my relationships with sleep and drinking, and I made an appointment with CAP services at my university.

exists in *Frankenstein*. Director James Whale intended to end his film with Frankenstein and the creature meeting a fiery death (Skal, 1993). However, the criticisms of censors compelled Universal executives to rethink the ending, and Whale was tasked with writing and filming a more palatable conclusion. In the scene, six maids carry a bottle of wine to Frankenstein's bed chamber, and tell his father The Baron that a glass of wine may help his recovery. Through the doorway we see a bedridden extra dressed like actor Colin Clive, suggesting to the viewer that Frankenstein survived the fury after all. As the Baron closes Frankenstein's door, he tells the maids his son "doesn't need" the wine for his wellbeing.

Since writing my poem, I have noticed that I take more rest days, and sometimes I even close the door when the chatter outside becomes too much. I am more mindful of when to slow my stride, and I get less frustrated at myself when I take breaks. When offered a glass of wine, sometimes I say that I don't need it. I try to talk more transparently about my daemons now, turning them into metaphorical monsters in my stories. Recovery is a slow process, but lately, the silent lake by my school doesn't seem as worthy of contemplation.

"It Be Like That Sometimes"

In which the poet: writes an autoethnographic narrative about failing to deliver a promise.

The best way for me to describe Last Chance is to describe the simple process of entering through the building. Don't imagine the elegantly manicured circle drive packed with rumbling buses and benches of kids in front of the school you may have gone to. At this facility there is a single reinforced glass door that auto-locks, an intercom call box to the left side, and a mounted security camera overhead. When I press the buzzer and stare into the shifting camera lens I always think of my first volunteer teaching gig at a juvenile detention center in Kentucky. They have a steel door, but everything else looks the same. Same callbox with clunky buttons. Same camera with thick casing built to withstand the blow of hurled stones.

When you enter through the front door a sign on the brick wall says to head to the right for Last Chance High. To the left: a GED program for teens and adults who have dropped out of school. I feel crushed every time I see the sign. If I lived a life where getting to and through class every day was a hassle, how hard would it be to walk to the right each time I entered the door? What if I turned left one time? Every day the building itself presents failure as a practical choice.

On every wall in the hallway of Last Chance there are murals of famous children's book covers. Charlotte weaves her web above the heads of Fern and Wilbur the pig. Winnie the Pooh clutches a round pot and licks the honey smothered across his nose. One time I mentioned to my colleague how much I loved the paintings, how they reminded me of my childhood trips to the library and the picture book readings I'd seen. He said he hated them. "This is a high school. The murals here treat the students like little kids." And then I got real quiet and remembered not everyone got to sleep in a bedroom where *The Digging-est Dog* was read aloud every night by a librarian mother and dad with a gift for making great dog noises.

Just past the bend in the hallway is an open-top Dutch door that serves as an entrance to the office. A singular clipboard with a visitor log sits on the ledge. The visitor's view of the office looks almost like the little window in the brick where nurses dispense pills at nursing homes. The first day I arrived, the office administrator smiled when she saw me. She asked my name and wanted to know why I'd come to the school. I told her I was a student, doing research. With the University, I added. Her smile softened and she swiveled her chair back to the computer. She did not offer her name in return. "Just put the school name on the sheet," she said. "We get University students like you here all the time." Her tone said she knew what I knew, but was not then willing to admit. That my name was not worth her learning. She would see me once a week for six months, then she would likely never see me again.

I wanted my relationship with the student body of Last Chance to be reciprocal, not some one-sided relationship where only I benefited from the exchange. I asked myself: how can I use my skill set to help students transform their learning space. I became more and more fixated on the murals, and how metaphorically they represented a school culture stuck in time. When I inquired about whether we could paint over the walls, I learned I wasn't the only one with strong feelings. Other educators and administrators had tried to change the scenery too, but some local stakeholders pushed back, citing a need for "historical preservation."

So instead, I turned my focus to a blank white fence on the schoolyard. I approached the principal with an offer: if I could raise the money myself, would he be willing to let me organize a mural project using the fence behind the school. Since students couldn't see their culture represented on the walls inside the school, I thought it would be fitting to showcase the words and images of the student body in a space the whole community could see. We agreed upon a plan: a host teacher and I would create a mixed media after-school program, where students

would be invited to express themselves through poetry and art. The project, "Building Greater Stories," had three goals:

1. Students in the club will explore their identities and backgrounds by writing narrative poetry during weekly workshops.
2. Students in the club will devise a culminating project for the semester where they create a public mural that tells their story through image and text.
3. The semester-long project will end with a year-end celebration, where we unveil our mural and students will perform the poetry they have written and revised all year.

The plan made for a dynamo grant application: a youth-led arts project where teens reclaim their space with graffitied testimonies. I found a public arts grant sponsored by the city, and wrote an impassioned proposal. I was thrilled when the project was awarded 4000 dollars. Now there was surely nothing stopping us in establishing a transformative program at the school. After all: we had money and a dedicated team of professionals. What other tools could we need?

To give away the ending, the project slowly imploded over the course of the year. There was no lively student-led extracurricular club. There was no bright, bold mural filled with student work. The obstacles were seemingly insurmountable, and I felt like I had failed. "It be like that sometimes," was a refrain that many students at the school used when life presents its ups and downs. I had a presentation accepted at the 2018 Literacy Research Association, and I had no stories of success or student work to share. One of my professors encouraged me to cancel my presentation, but the idea didn't sit right with me. Why was I allowed to enter a "failing school" as an expert—where failure is a stigma—yet erase my own narrative of failures when things didn't go my way? I felt a great sense of guilt and shame, and I felt discouraged from sharing these emotions with my peers in the research community. Brené Brown (2015) claimed that "emotional accessibility is a shame trigger for researchers and academics" (p. 12) She stressed that researchers are encouraged to adorn "professional armor," and are discouraged from expressing vulnerability about our work. I decided that I would embrace my emotion of

shame and present the results of my project. I decided to explore my failure in front of an audience, in hopes that all of us could learn from my missteps.

Choreographer Twyla Tharp (2003) once said, “The best failures are the private ones you commit in the confines of your room, alone, with no strangers watching. Private failures are great” (p. 213). I started to recognize that sharing my failures with my academic peers was a way to stage my own private failure, in a relatively safe space. Tharp claims there are different types of failure to consider in order to “fail forward,” and three are relevant to consider here: 1) Failure of Skill, 2) Failure of Concept, and 3) Failure of Denial. I intended to include a chapter in my dissertation about the rich successes of the after school program. In order to embrace my vulnerabilities, I have decided to briefly comment on the three failures—and three lessons learned—from this project.

First, “failure of skill” is interesting to consider because of the assumed expertise of stakeholders involved. I knew I was qualified to organize the curricula and facilitate programming for the club. The cooperating teacher was nationally certified, and the new principal was supportive of the program. I raised money to hire two professional poets and two muralists to serve as visiting mentors. How could there possibly be a failure of skill? The truth is while we excelled as educators, the stakeholders of this project lacked experience as project directors. One major mistake is that I wrote the grant through a partnership with the school corporation—and not the university where I was employed. I thought this path would allow us to avoid the institutional bureaucracy of the university—and it did. On the flipside, I suddenly realized that no one attached to the project had control of the budget. For every budget concern, I had to call a school administrator and beg her to process the order. It took over seven months alone just to order wood and paint supplies for the mural. I couldn’t buy classroom supplies like journals and pens, and I couldn’t process travel accommodations for visiting artists. I ended up

paying a visiting poet 100 dollars out of my own pocket, just because the unexpected gatekeepers refused to process her stipend. This failure of skill suggests a need for poetry communities to improve their "financial literacy" (Huston, 2010). Poets and educators invested in pedagogies of liberation could stand to benefit from increased access and autonomy over "the faucet."

Second, the "failure of concept" is intriguing to consider because the concept of the project was arguably strong on paper. The proposed benefits included critical literacy and creative expression. The project goal was open-ended and invited students of various talents to "buy in" in their own way. The deliverables of the grant seemed like they would yield great photo opportunities and narratives of success. The teaching artist, teacher, and administrator involved all shared a similar vision for the project. However, there was a major failure in concept in expressing the importance of the project to other teachers in the building. When I brought Chicago poet Adrienne Nadeau to perform in the tiny cafeteria, I was surprised to hear other teachers in the building complaining about the special event. This school never had visiting authors or artists, yet teachers were upset about the disruption to their classroom schedule. They did not see the value of the program because I had failed to communicate it to them. There was also a disconnect with the student body, who did not feel engaged by the concept. In addition to the project grant, we also received a small travel stipend to take students to an exhibit on graffiti in the late 70's Bronx. I was so excited to introduce them to artists like Keith Haring, Lee Quiñones, Lady Pink, and Rammellzee. They were wildly unimpressed with the exhibit. This failure in concept occurred because I assumed that poetry and mural art were inherently culturally relevant pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1995). However, my failure should be a reminder to stakeholders that such pedagogies are not top-down in nature. I later learned that the students were more interested in tabletop gaming and the indie rock scene. Teachers and teaching

artists can learn from my mistake by building their curriculum around the strengths of their students—rather than the strengths of themselves.

Finally, it is necessary to consider "failure of denial," because ultimately poetry is about the spirit of truth and affirmation. Poetry and production often rely on assumptions of faith that dysfunctional dress rehearsals will be transformed into flawlessly executed performances. However, it took months for stakeholders on the team to admit that the project was failing. For example, when a call-out meeting successfully recruited several students to participate, we set a timeline for club meetings. However, due to the transient nature of the student body, our pool of interested students disappeared in a manner of weeks. We started over with a new call-out meeting, and an adjusted timeline. And repeat. As the months dragged on, the stakeholders of the project went into "ostrich mode" (Thomas, 2000). Essentially, we buried our head in the sand and pretended everything was fine. This failure in denial suggests that stakeholders in arts-based education could benefit from adopting a Youth Participant Action Research model (Fine & Cammarota, 2008), a framework where classroom communities address critical issues by collaboratively working together as co-researchers. If we had relinquished control and invited students to participate in the design, scope, and focus of the project, the vision of the project may have expanded beyond the sight of the mentors with their heads in the ground.

I wish there were more to say. I don't have any impassioned or inspirational poems to share. All my stories are about showing up to empty classrooms and rescheduling plans. Even this chapter feels like a failure, given its absence of student voice. In the winter of 2018 I cancelled the project and gave all the awarded funds back to the city—with an email apologizing for my failure to deliver a transformed space. It was one of the most embarrassing and shameful moments of my career. Certainly I still have lessons to learn, even though I am no longer active at the school. I learned that a year later, the principal had successfully convinced the city to let

him remove the murals in the school hallway. Slowly, wall-by-wall, he began to replace the gawdy images with student work and art. I wonder today: did any of the new fixtures include paint splatter? Were there any poems on the wall?

Mother Bears, Our Golden Shovel

In which the poet: hides Gwendolyn Brooks' poem "We Real Cool" inside a poem about blowing off steam at the bar of a pizza parlor.

Inspired by Terrance Hayes who was
inspired by Gwendolyn Brooks

Shutting off our computer screens we
ask an office mate to meet for a real

quick drink. Her subsided smile says: *not cool*
with slamming glasses at noon. Like striders we

pull our hoodies high, over eyes, and turn left
toward the descending stair—escaping the School

of Ed like rangers evading Uruk-hai. We
dart past Third Street, trying not to lurk

longer outside—fingers crossed we are not late
to claim our stools. Greeting the barkeep, we

order *Alpha Kings*, and watch Palpatine strike
back on the bar TV. With cheese sticks straight

from the oven to chomp: we prattle dad jokes; we
talk office gossip; we mock friends who sing

on Instagram; we commit the indefensible sin
of debating politics at a bar. At drink two we

ask ourselves why we wear ourselves thin,
and mix every drink (except maybe gin).

My phone rattles with an e-mail notification and we
jump as if a cymbal crashed on counter like jazz:

a forgotten office hour with my student, Yi June.
Throwing dollars, my friend says softly as we

leave, *the proposal stage makes me want to die.*
I say, not meaning to be dreadful: *It will end soon.*

T(h)eam Four: "Ambiguity"

The most mysterious part of every slam is the bout draw. Poets in the competition typically gather around the bout manager and draw slips of paper to determine their order. Poets who draw larger numbers are afforded more opportunity to strategize—and may benefit from "score creep" as the energy of the bout warms up (Aptowicz, 2008). Drawing the one slot is jokingly known as the "kiss of death." Poets are more likely to be met with silence, and score low, which may alter their strategy for selecting which poem to perform. The ambiguity of the bout draw can affect the order of performances for the entire night. Poets who score low are knocked out of the competition, and those who score high must make new choices in the next round: do you shift the tone of your next poem? Do you have something unexpected to share?

Ambiguity is also a feature of poetic inquiry, which affects the ways creative researchers tell stories. Sullivan (2009) criticized the notion that linearity should be a required goal of poet researchers, because nonlinearity is "a characteristic of poetry" and an "inclination of poets." The job of the bard is to reinterpret things that have been seen and experienced, or "flip the script" as they say (Miller, 2004), and present what the poet has stolen back to the world as a freshly wrapped gift. The role of the poet is similar to the turntablist in this sense, because as DJ Spooky (Miller, 2004) explained, remixing samples "is all about reprocessing the world around you," (p. 29). The poet's aim is to provide multiple interpretations of how a thing exists in the field, rather than trying to pinpoint the exactness of how phenomena function. Raingruber (2009) said a quality of poetry is that "shifts in meaning" often occur through reinterpretations. Sameshima's (2007) dynamic work *Seeing Red* used the metaphor of the parallax, which is the "apparent change of location of an object against a background due to the change in observer position or perspective shift" (p. 225). She claimed that the sharing of stories encourages inquirers to expand their notions of what is commonly deemed normative, which provides a

space in research for potential shifts between subjects and an increased diversity of interpretation of meaning. In another publication, Sameshima and Vandermouse (2009) connected the metaphor of the parallax to Bahktin's (1986) concept of heteroglossia, "which refers to the inclusion of all conflicting voices as having a value" (Sameshima & Vandermouse, 2009, p. 279). This dissertation includes many conflicting voices, stitched together into a tapestry-like narrative.

Regarding the t(h)eam of *ambiguity*, several barriers exist for artists from the community related to possessing and utilizing the literacy skills necessary to navigate institutional gatekeepers and bureaucracy. Weinstein and West (2012) pointed to discrepancies in the language skills that spoken word pedagogy fosters and the language skills necessary to thrive in a competitive capitalistic society. The avenues that poets need to take toward creating sustainable literacy spaces, such as writing grants or preparing documents for the IRS, are often unknown literacy skills to freelance writers (Bowerman, 2000). Working in education systems requires teachers to speak a specialized language and set of jargon, and as a result, the pathway toward educational partnerships for some poets often seems unclear or even unavailable.

Second, there is a lack of literature detailing the best practices of the artist-researcher-educator (Cahnman, 2003). On the flip side, some youth find the ambiguity of "rules" one of the most appealing parts of spoken word (Clay, 2006), because it allows writers to subvert traditional conventions and implement their own standards of rigor. This does not always sit well with administrators who want a detailed plan. As Weinstein and West (2012) explained, "the field's commitment to celebrating local, situated practices means that efforts to codify (dare we say standardize?) knowledge about the field, or to offer decontextualized knowledge in the form of best practices, are largely perceived as undesirable" (p. 285).

The first chapter for the *ambiguity* t(h)eam, “The Poetry Carnival” complicates our notions of academic and community spaces by presenting an autoethnographic narrative about the blended conventions of poetry. The second chapter, “Lectures I Will Never Give,” is a prose poem about the murky ways I “spent time” as a program coordinator at a community center for Black youth. The third chapter, “Your Heart Becomes a Starfish” is an autoethnographic narrative about the unexpected lessons students and staff learned at Slam Camp. Finally, “On Daemons” is a hybrid narrative about the poets I love who have died since I started graduate school in 2010.

The Poetry Carnival

In which the poet: remixes the audio transcripts of two interviews, two newspaper clippings, and an email, to create a hybrid narrative about blurring conventions at a unique poetry festival.

There were candied apples on the counter and a cotton candy machine in the corner of the room. Little kids were getting their faces painted and chalking up the sidewalk outside the door. There was a photo booth with zany props and balloons everywhere. And there were poets. Lots of poets. This is the Divedapper "Poetry Carnival," an annual event hosted by the MFA program at Butler University (Lindquist, 2017). Though this lively environment looks different than a lot of readings in academic spaces, Divedapper has hosted a volume of top-tier feature poets such as Danez Smith, Adrian Matejka, Eduardo C. Corral, Franny Choi, Hanif Abdurraqib, Nicole Sealey, Ross Gay, Tarfia Faizullah, Francine J. Harris, Wendy Xu, Aimee Nezhukumatathil, and Heather Christle. Divedapper shares the name of a website created by Kaveh Akbar, which is dedicated to interviewing the most electric poets of note in the contemporary scene.

This is the only chapter in this dissertation where I did not play a direct role as an artist, educator, or organizer at the event of study. Often these roles shift with each change of venue. When I walk into a poetry event, I am not always sure what my role is going to be: sometimes a colleague will ask me to emcee, or twist my arm into signing up to read. Sometimes there is a slam and I get recruited to find judges and explain the rules to them. I've even been recruited to play DJ before, and I'll fumble around with the sound equipment while trying to break anything. Even on the days I attend an event as an audience member, I may still end up stacking folding chairs at the end of the night. Poetry events are inherently non-passive: audience members are encouraged to participate in events by laughing, snapping, clapping, and stomping (Fiore, 2015). This is why ethnographer Maisha Winn (Fisher, 2017) adopted the term "participant observer" in her study of a poetry community in the Bronx, because it allowed for shifts between her active

and reflective stances as a researcher. In this chapter, I document my two visits to the Divedapper Carnival as a participant-observer, to explore why the ambiguous nature of poetry is something to celebrate.

An immediate observation of the Divedapper Carnival was a blending of spaces. Co-creator Mindy Dunn stated, "Our unofficial tagline is the National Book Award meets the Indiana State Fair" (Tzvetkova, 2016). The book-fair-in-a-circus-tent aesthetic wasn't the only ambiguous quality of Divedapper; the lineup also featured poets with varied experiences in relation to the academy. Some poets gained their popularity in the competitive slam scene, or achieved viral fame, while others used the more traditional avenue of an MFA program. Some poets are tenured professors, while others are elementary school teachers. There are older, established poets and promising up-and-comers. All the poets have had their work featured in prominent literary journals, but some excel in other genres of writing as well. I had an opportunity to interview Hanif Abdurraqib, who has also gained prominence as a cultural critic, writing for music publications like *MTV* and *Pitchfork.* "I think we are at a point where it is kind of blending," he said, in regards to the mixing of writing conventions in contemporary writing. "Poets are putting poetic aspects into longer form writing, and essayists are reading more poems. I think larger writing communities are willing to bridge between themselves and the genres they are working outside of?" I asked Hanif what educators could learn from such ambiguities, and he replied, "There are diverse and unique entry points for all kinds of writing." His comments confront prescriptivist approaches to writing in classrooms, arguing that writing doesn't have to be "singular" or "look a certain way."

Kaveh Akbar's poetry also blurs the public's expectations of convention and style. He never slams in competitions, but he sometimes gets associated with the spoken word movement. He thinks it's because he's "a good reader," which speaks to a common assumption that poets

with academic backgrounds are incapable of dynamic performance. Kaveh naturally speaks in metaphors and idioms, so I thought an interview with him would be a great opportunity to practice "poetic transcription" (Glesne, 1997). I transcribed an audio-recorded interview with Kaveh, and then added poetic elements such as line breaks to capture shifts in tone and rate of speech. I asked Kaveh what inspired him to create Divedapper, a website and carnival that showcases poets from diverse backgrounds and experiences. He said:

> These are people whose words
>
> have absolutely shaped my psychic life,
> and therefore my experience of the world around me
>
> So to be able to sort of go
> under their hoods and poke around
> and study how they make what they make—
>
> it's been this series of miniature apprenticeships for me
>
> not only as a poet but also as a person
> who lives in the same world
> that they are thinking about in many of the same ways

Attending the Divedapper event was a motivating reason to visit multiple poetry spaces in this dissertation, because the event was a converging of poetic worlds to me. I attended the event with Tony, my friend from the Poetry On Demand narrative thread. He took advantage of the opportunity to purchase several poetry books from the tables of vendors, who many patrons felt resembled a grown-up version of The Scholastic Book Fair displays we saw as kids in school. I also saw two of my students from Slam Camp, and their parents. At one moment I felt a tension about whether I should hide the beer I was drinking, which alludes to the ambiguity that some teaching artists feel about the boundaries between their professional and private lives. I asked one student how he felt about his experience at Divedapper, and he later told me via email: "This event brings different people from a variety of backgrounds and cultures, so it forms a melting pot of people who all have something in common."

The ambiguous "spaces" of events like Divedapper encouraged me to use "poetic representation" (Richardson, 1997). Cahnmann (2003) claimed that poetic methods expand what is possible in terms of what constitutes research, which provides opportunities for us to open the space of our field in both figurative and literal ways, and develop a "wide scope of seeing" (p. 32). I wanted to examine spaces like Divedapper up close, but I also wanted to take a step back and contextualize this experience with other poetry events I've visited. For example, one unique quality of Divedapper was the amount of children at the event. I have been to many "family friendly" poetry events, but I've attended very few readings on a college campus where five-year-olds are running around with sugar and clown makeup on their faces. Hanif told me this was evidence of Divedapper's success in opening an accessible space, and "finding ways to engage young people." I also asked Kaveh about why he valued making space for young people, at a venue typically dedicated to adult learning. I decided to break his lines into stanzas, to create a poem with age-appropriate language. I also center-aligned the poem, to indicate that youth are at the center of this conversation. He said:

I think there's great value in
—and I know you do too—
in sharing the kind of rapturous joys
of poetry with young people,
you know. Those are going to be
the people writing the poems
that I'll be getting to read.

Every poet is just sort of
keeping the conversation alive
until we can pass it on, you know?

It's a conversation that has preceded us
and a conversation that will continue
long after the last person
forgets our names. There's something
really kind of sacred about that,
about passing that on.

Divedapper also artfully blended tone, to create a nuanced, emotional experience for the audience. While there is a carnival barker quality to the showmanship of the event, many of the poets shared some urgent, meaningful work. Many poems were difficult explorations of topics like death and discrimination. Poets shared tough testimonies about their identities and inequity in society, while we munched on popcorn in the audience. This blending of tone suggested that the "playfulness" (Richardson, 1997) of poets does not undermine their ability to be "agents of change" (Stovall, 2006). I asked Kaveh why there is an urgency to poetry, even when accompanied by balloon animals and a dunking tank. I decided to right-align his response, and add line breaks, to highlight his allusions of using poetry to combat the rhetoric of the "Alt-Right."

> Especially in this moment / in American history / a sort of great weapon / used to suppress critical thinking altogether / is just a vast / overwhelm / of meaningless language / An onslaught / at every moment / of just completely / vapid doublespeak / Just nothing / And poetry / is unique / among the arts / in a way that it asks / us / to slow / down / our metabolization of language / It asks us / to be very intentional / and conscious about the ways / that we're receiving / and metabolizing language /And that skill / has never been more valuable / in American history / than it is / right now / in this moment / on September 12th / 2017 / By the looks of things / it will only be even more valuable / to be able to just / slow / down / and really think / about language / in critical / intense / sustained / ways

The ambiguity present at Divedapper encouraged participants to ask themselves the questions: "Is poetry the source of confusion here? Or are we the source of confusion, with our insistence on labeling poetry or categorizing it into a box? Divedapper reframes the assumption that poetry is confusing, because poetic narrative is the common language spoken by all the attendees. Hanif believed that poetry can be a powerful tool for educators, because it can serve as an avenue to begin the practice of critical discourse. "It can really bridge gaps and start

conversations with folks who don't really have an entry point for artistic expression," he said, adding that he "found poetry" because he loved writing and "wanted another venue for it." I agreed with his assessment, because I have used the poems as an entry point for scores of different writing assignments. Poetry can "break the ice" between different writing disciplines.

I also commonly use poetic narratives as a unifying thread for my academic writing, which should be evident in this dissertation. Faulkner (2017) situated the authoring of autoethnographic poetry as a political act, which should interest practitioners of "critical qualitative inquiry" (Denzin, 2017). The first person "I" allows writers to showcase the combination of a reflective and reflexive voice in the field. In the words of Ellis and Bochner (2000): "Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an auto-ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations" (p. 739). Additionally, Brady (2009) states that approaching qualitative research with a poet's eye allows writers to look through multiple lenses, and shift between theoretical, observational, action-oriented, and reflexive perspectives:

> Poetic methods are qualitative and call for self-conscious participation. Instead of being inverted like a telescope for a distancing effect, poetics turns it back around for magnified encounters with life as lived, up close and personal, and sets it in a mode where everything reported is proprietary, overtly as the authors write about their presence in the research or implicitly on the strength of always claiming the representations as a personal product (interpretation) of sorts (p. xii).

While I was just an audience member at Divedapper, the various reflexive lenses of the poets on stage encouraged me to reexamine my own stances and experiences as a human being. I thought about my own childhood. My own political ideologies. My own work as a teacher and an artist. The celebration was all around me, chanted by multiple voices for multiple reasons, and yet I was encouraged to reconsider how I celebrate poetry in my life. After a day-long commemoration of poetry, I asked Kaveh why he thinks poetry is worth celebrating.

To me there is nothing
more delightful, really full
of delight, than the experience
of finding oneself in a poem.
Or the experience of encountering
a completely new way of thinking
about language in a poem.

I'm sort of the evangelical spirit
where I am eager to bang my pots and pans
and wave my pompons on the behalf of poetry
in every encounter I am in. I owe poetry everything
that I have in my life. Like Robert Pinsky talks about,
he wonders why people aren't just reciting poems
randomly. It is the best fucking thing in the world.

I feel like I have this
secret knowledge
and that I think everyone
is to some extent permeable to.

I think we're all wired to be able to delight
in rhythmic or charged language. Like you think
about people playing music for babies in the womb
and the baby's like responding to it in sort of ordered
or recognizable ways. We're sort of hardwired to be able
to appreciate certain rhythms and cadences in language.

There's this quote: it's by the poet James Dicky.
"What you have to realize when you write poetry,
or if you love poetry, is that poetry is just naturally
the greatest goddamn thing in the whole universe."
People who are deciding to devote their life to this thing:
it probably isn't going to pay them very well,
probably not going to make them famous,
probably not going to offer a ton of
job security or welfare or any of these things.
They're probably doing it because they feel
deeply and passionately about this thing,
this poetry thing, is the greatest god damn
thing there is in the whole universe.

So I think there is a kind of a natural ward
that exists among people, the fundamental
bedrock upon which they built their lives.

Lectures I Will Never Give

In which the poet: stuck in quarantine reflects upon the time he spent teaching at a community center four hours away from his current shelter-at-home workspace.

> I never believed, for a moment, that anyone ever learned a single thing about poetry from hearing a lecture. Don't misunderstand me; lectures are important insofar as they teach us how to *talk* about poems, but never do they teach us how to write them. Nothing does. Except, sometimes, the dead.
>
> Mary Ruefle (2012, p. 253)

There are many reasons I don't want to work on my dissertation, and you should probably know it made me angry and sad to stick to a writing deadline in the middle of a pandemic. I wanted to curl up in a bed or stare slack-jawed at a film. Perhaps I could stop the fuss over productivity, and pick up an old book, like poet Mary Ruefle's collected lectures, *Madness, Rack, and Honey* (2012). In her chapter, "Lectures I Will Never Give." she wrote: "At the very outset I will tell you that if you think I know something or anything, I am just pretending to know as a way to pass the time" (p. 279).

She explained that she never intended to write the chapter (or the book for that matter), but when preparing for a lecture, she "came across a few untethered pieces of paper" that intrigued her (p. 280). She said that though she was no longer capable of piecing them into a lecture, she still wanted to share them. The move is not entirely benevolent. "Lectures, for me, are bad dreams," she wrote (Ruefle, 2012, p. 280).

When I sort through my folders of scrap paper and scribbled notes, I relate to Ruefle's intrigue. The time until my dissertation defense is winding down, as I wait out a quarantine, and return from distance learning. So I decided to turn these untethered pieces into my own "Lectures That I Will Never Give." Though they are a nonlinear collection of fragments, they include data from a summer literacy program called "Peace of Mind," which I facilitated at a youth community center with the help of my friend James. I share them with you, as a way to "pass the

time." Instead of preparing a traditional chapter, I'll instead focus on telling you the things I would normally be afraid to tell you about teaching poetry. These short "lectures," or whatever you call them, all deal in some way with the theme of "time," and its persistently passive nature.

Do you want to get started? James asks, looking around the room.

I am walking here and there, adjusting the tables and chairs. It feels like I am searching for something, but I am not sure what. The kids are sitting in their seats, bouncing their feet like their shoes are rubber balls attached to a paddleboard. The skepticism on their face is not unwarranted.

Five more minutes, I ask? He shrugs, and I go back to straightening papers, and shuffling through my briefcase.

Tonight I am writing this lecture:

- in the middle of a tornado warning
- in the middle of a quarantine
- and economic implosion and environmental collapse

—when suddenly the glass pane of my oven door explodes. An eruption of glass showers down onto the ground. I don't know if it is a flaw in the plan or the pressure in the air, but the blast is like a cherry bomb.

Instead of researching remix literacies, I research studies about exploding oven doors on the internet. I sweep shattered glass and yell at the dogs to stay away as thunder crashes and wind beats against the door. Sirens wail in the distance as I talk to customer service on the phone, who asks if I am alright and whether I have unplugged the unit. I'm supposed to be writing, I say to the operator. I'm sorry, but I just don't have any time for this. I don't have any time for this.

Can I hang out here with the bigger kids? an elementary-aged student asks while tugging on my jeans. He is hovering beside a bigger version of himself, who I assume is the older brother. He has smudges on his face that I think are cake.

No, James says. Not this time. You can come when you're older. Go out and play with the other kids. We'll still be here when you're grown up.

I call James on the phone, and he says he is sorry he hasn't gotten back to me.

No I'm sorry, I say, I've let things slip away.

He says sorry, he's just been caught up at the office, and it's hard to sleep with a newborn baby. My bad man, he says.

No, I'm in the same boat, I say. I've been playing catch up all week.

Well, should we talk at a better time? he asks.

Yeah, sorry. I'm in between meetings, I say. Let's link up later tonight.

Okay, he says.

Okay, I say. Sorry.

After driving three hours from another state away, I arrive at the community center and none of my students are present. Except for the girl with freckles who runs in and out of the room on a whim—but she has declared she is not coming to class today because she wants to color in the art room.

I walk up to James to see him sitting at the park bench outside. Two teen boys are crowded around him and they are watching a music video on his phone. What do you want to do? I ask him.

He shrugs. I think you're looking at it, he says. I think for a moment, and sit down at the park bench. I ask the kids their names and they say they like my tennis shoes. James and I spend more than an hour sitting at the bench, asking kids their names. We point to the superheroes on their shirts and talk about our favorite comic book villains. We talk about our favorite sports teams, and debate about which video games are the best to play right now. Hey, James asks, any of y'all heard of spoken word before? Check this video out.

Tell me, I ask. Who do y'all think is the greatest rapper of all time?

In his influential book of lectures *The Triggering Town*, poet Richard Hugo (1979) said: "Writing is a way of saying you and the world have a chance. All art is failure" (p. 72). But what does it mean when you fail to make art?

Because I am sitting in quarantine and not feeling good about the chances of the world, or mine either. I am failing to even commit gibberish to the page. I am supposed to be analyzing my data from a community center far away, but I am scrolling through news feeds on my phone. Now is the perfect time to work on your dissertation, everyone keeps saying.

Richard Hugo (1979) said, "An act of imagination is an act of self-acceptance." I am imagining a world of no schools and no music shows and no physical touch. I am imagining that I can quit drinking when I want, and learning to accept the tightness of my pants waistline. I wish I could write a Hugo quotation on a chalkboard and ask a young person what they think it means.

I search the files in my smartphone for my interview with James. We had sat in his kitchen with a finger of McKenna bourbon and talked about the biggest obstacle we have: time. I realize I have accidentally erased the audio while transferring files. Today I am missing my students, and failing so badly, that Richard Hugo might call it art.

I am sitting on a ledge in the shelter of the public park next to the community center, and a teenage girl is reading a poem while standing on a park bench. On top of the table are a stack of two dozen middle reader poetry books that I brought so kids could practice reciting a poem out loud. I tell students they've used their diaphram before, when they've had to yell in their house—Mom! I need some toilet paper! We all stand in a circle, and with hands on our abdomens, we all yell, Mom! I need some toilet paper! One student volunteers to read over and over again. She reads poems by Sarah Holbrook and Allan Wolf. An aid from the center says just a couple weeks ago she was crying about going to writing class, but now she can't get enough poetry.

I send students on a poetic scavenger hunt. I tell them to search around the park and find the most vivid images they can find, and write them down in their journal. Orange traffic cones and a green broken bottle. Squished bug guts and a bent fence rail. There are so many images, the kids say to me while running around in circles.

Suddenly a car pulls up and a parent steps out of the driver's seat. They have plans tonight and he needs to pick up their daughter early. I remind him about the upcoming upon mic and say I'd love for her to perform. Huh, he asks. The music is blaring from his stereo. I say we are staging an open mic for the kids to perform. We'd love for your daughter to perform. I'm sorry, I gotta go, he says. Whatever it is, I am sure she will tell me the date and time.

Charles Bukowski once said, "there's nothing worse / than / too late" (1984). But have you ever had too little? I think that is way worse. When the energy you bring to a class is empty handed, and you lock eyes with a kid, and their eyes ask, Is this little bit the best you got?

And you: dragging ass, lagging like a Walkman with one good battery and one bad, will say with your gaze, yeah, it is. And just like that, with so little to share, too late seems so inconsequential.

Did you get your check, James asks me.

Yeah, I finally got it. Sorry, I should have let you know sooner.

No, I'm sorry that it took so long.

No, I say. It could have been longer. Trust me. Sometimes universities take like six months to get you paid.

Miller (2017) says of freelance writing: "the worst part of the job — by far — is trying to get paid" (p. 1). She adds that the process of collecting payment "can be time consuming, maddening — and often enraging." According to the Freelancer's Union, the average unpaid freelance worker is owed an average of 6000 dollars (Horowitz, 2015). We say we do it for the art, but unfortunately my landlord isn't into art.

I only had to wait a few weeks, so I got off easy this time. I am happy to have a friend to call who knows the lady whose name is on the check.

Thanks for the solid, I say.

No sweat.

It is the beginning of April, 2020, and an article on NPR states that roughly 9 out of 10 students around the world are currently out of school because of Covid-19 (Kamenetz, 2020). The story features several interviews with experts in the field of "education in crisis," who have studied education efforts in wartime, natural disaster, and pandemics. The consensus of experts in the article agree: "From New Orleans and Rwanda: It can take years for students to recover the learning they've lost."

Blocks away from the capitol building in their state, I know my students are sheltered away in their rooms or their front porches. I wonder if they have anything good to read. I wonder: are any of them writing poems?

Your Heart Becomes a Starfish

In which the poet: remixes two interview transcripts, a handwritten note, an Instagram post, and a poem to construct an authoethnographic narrative on the unexpected lessons of Slam Camp.

On the first day of Slam Camp, students were instructed to arrive at the Student Union and search for the registration table. All the other camps had registration tables too: golf, tennis, basketball, gymnastics, hockey, baseball, soccer, swimming, and volleyball. These tables seemed to attract a sea of teens in identical athletic shorts and crew cut t-shirts. At the Slam Camp table, the counselors liked to play a game called "spot the poet." In the sea of Nike and Adidas apparel, we saw green hair and Dr. Martens boots. Eyebrow piercings and neck tattoos. Cut sleeves and ripped jeans. There were feminine presenting students with armpit hair and unshaven legs. Some students waited for their parents to leave before changing out of men's jeans and into dresses. These were the students who showed up to the Slam Camp table, with a suitcase, bedroll, and a backpack filled with books.

"Look," Sierra DeMulder said, the co-director of camp. She was pointing at a group of returning students who attended the year before. "They *walk* differently." She was right. The year before they were all slouched shoulders and pigeon toes. Just a year later our students walked with a confident stride. Sierra wrote a poem about lessons that she learned from our campers.

> 5 THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT BEING A POETRY SLAM CAMP COUNSELOR
> 1. When the campers arrive, sweaty and nervous, and you meet them for the first time, they will be exactly as you imagined them. As if out of your own yearbook, they will be a blurry masterpiece: a paint-by-memory mosaic of every water fountain drowning, drama club captain, fall-in-sleep-in-physics-but-nobody-noticed ninjas. When they tell you their names, you will have to stop yourself from saying, "I know."
>
> 2. The other campers that will surround you in the Dining Hall at lunch will wear sweat bands, cleats, and sports bras. They will be significantly and visibly stronger than you but will surprisingly eat smaller portions. You will bond over this -- this sacred heartbeat of creativity: what makes you different makes you special. You will silently acknowledge that you and your campers are the only ones in this hall carrying books instead of baseball bats, although both are equally dangerous.

> 3. You will try and fail to describe your love for poetry -- that confused polygraph in your chest that dances for nothing but Truth in an ugly dress. You will realize you don't have to tell them anything.
>
> 4. Show them. Let them sit in that stubborn silence until one of them raises their hands. Let them find the hook. Let them feel the pulling. Let them reel in the fishing line of their voice. Let them cry. Let them push. Let them shake that jammed vending machine. You put in the money but they gotta earn the treat.
>
> 5. When you huddle at night with the campers to share each of your favorite moments of the day, you secretly hope one of them will say you. But when it is her turn, the one with the smallest hands, and she tells you that it is her first time crying in three years and she is actually proud of herself, your heart becomes a starfish growing back its legs.

When I initially started collecting data for this dissertation, my plan was to talk about the lectures and lesson plans of Slam Camp. I planned on analyzing the poems of Slam Camp alumni, to explore the craft and conventions that students learned in the workshops. But when I interviewed students years after their camp experiences, they admitted to me they couldn't really remember the content of any of our academic sessions. The lessons they learned were more ambiguous. A student I'll call Mia said her favorite memory was when we would dress in silly outfits just to make the campers laugh. She said she remembers the late night cyphers in the dorm and the jokes told in the cafeteria. Mia told me the silliness of Slam Camp prepared her to be a Resident Advisor in her dorm in college. She learned to lift spirits with inside jokes. She built community by sharing photos on Instagram. Slam Camp was a space to leave affirmations for one another: we left digital messages on social media and handwritten messages on sticky notes in the lecture hall. I kept my note from Mia, where she noted the lessons she learned taking silliness seriously:

> I like that you are so pragmatic and professional, and personal at the same time. You are so extremely intelligent, and I am very very grateful that you are one of the wonderful people running this camp. Follow your dreams.

Every year the counselors conclude Slam Camp by writing affirmations on the white board for students. One message read: "WHO YOU ARE HERE, YOU ARE EVERYWHERE."

If there is any lesson about literacy to be learned, it's that we encouraged campers to fill the spaces around them with affirmations. One student left Slam Camp and had the word “Speak” tattooed across her wrist. On an Instagram post she said:

> It’s reminding me to speak up, that my voice deserves to be heard, and all the wonderful things I’ve learned and times I’ve had at slam camp <sic>. Thank you for helping me realize my power.

At the end of every day of Slam Camp, we invited the students and counselors to “circle up” in a central space. Every person received a turn and was invited to give their daily testimony. One student, who I’ll call Sophie, said they learned a different lesson sitting next to their peers. They said some students in the circle had visible self-harm scars. Some were vocal about their experiences with drug use and sexual assault. “Seeing an incredible breadth of experiences,” Sophie said, gave themself a “wider sense of empathy.” There was something to be said about the catharsis of Slam Camp. Sophie said, “To suddenly be in that space and be able to let it all go, it was so cleansing. This is so gross, but I want to say it is like squeezing the emotional zit.” While some stories were harder than others, Sophie pinpointed the value of hearing such stories: “I learned a lot about resilience. I listened to a lot of poems that were hard to listen to. And I found a way to be okay with that existing in the world, and finding a way to deal with that.”

I asked my student what their ultimate takeaway from Slam Camp was. Though Sophie was their chosen pseudonym, I think it is important to mention that this student’s preferred name changed between year one and year three. I asked them what Slam Camp taught them about affirmation. Sophie said, “I am a lesbian. I am non-binary. Being able to say that, without flinching at myself. You know what I mean?” It was a lot easier. It was a straight self-esteem booster. It was a lot easier to look at yourself in the mirror and say this is who I am and I am not going to apologize for it.”

As a display of the faith between us, I decided to use line breaks to transform the interview transcript into a poem called "I Can Take the Bus Alone."

Slam Camp is a whole weeklong affirmation
of what our worth is. *You are talented.*
You are knowledgeable. You deserve good things.
You deserve friendship, and love, and warmth.
And food, and sleep, and everything like that.
I literally attribute it to Slam Camp
that I get on planes alone.
Because I'm that much more secure.
I can take the bus alone. I can take the train alone.
Because even if somebody does look at me weird
or catcalls me. I can just keep on walking.
I can go straight through it.

On Daemons

In which the poet: reflects on videos, photographs, and text-messages to write a poem that communes with the dead.

1.

I am in the passenger's seat / of Asia Samson's car / in South Florida / He has pulled into an unfamiliar strip mall / There is a trophy store / and a law firm / Asia has mounted a video camera / on the dashboard / facing us / I assume he is setting up a candid shot / for his documentary / He says his film / is about the journey / to "find the poem" / He points to the storefront / and says: / "This was the Literary Café" / "O / h / s / h / i / t," / I yell Pointing to the concrete/ he says, / "Right over there / is where Will / passed away" / We step out / to show our respects / and Asia points / to where friends found him / slumped against his car / and shot in the head / Standing in the same parking lot / of Will's old poetry spot / on the same ground / once soaked in his blood / I say / with hands on my hips, / "I worry / when I am old / the things that I sustained / won't be / passed on"

2.

At the poetry slam
we wear bunny ears
and batman socks.
The favorite things
of beloved ones
who've left their
bodies and books
of poems behind.

When Tess placed
black nail polish
on top of Tavis' grave
it withstood hurricanes.
When Wendy paid a
visit the dedication
was still standing
on top of the stone
a whole year after
Tess had passed too.

3.

I had just returned / from the Indianapolis Motor Speedway / when Cuban called me / to let me know / someone killed Will / while he was locking up / his poetry spot / My dog had diarrhea / and the walls were splashed / with literal shit / I skipped / the big race / to sit on the floor / and stare / and call my friends / to say sorry / we don't talk / enough

4.

The same sages you've seen
soaked in bright stage lights
I met in a parking lot over a
passed glass of Poetry Punch.
There are more poets who
have passed on than I could
dedicated this dissertation to.
Shawna, and Shannon, and
Maggie, and Jack, and Pat.
The last time I saw Blair alive
he slayed the crowd with spit
like Little Richard reincarnated.
I still can't believe that man
could ever stop breathing.

5.

When Will died, / I called Tavis / When Tavis died, / I didn't know who / to speak
to / His last / social media status / said the voice of criticism / in his head / was my own
Then an aneurysm / ruptured his brain / I was too broke / to buy a bus ticket / so instead
I lost myself / in academic work / The voice of criticism / bleeding within my skull
One night / while walking to the store / I thought of him / wishing I could be the glue
he always was / How can we carry on / without feeling / his spirit? / When I crossed the
road / from my apartment complex, / I stopped / to see / a deer/ standing in front of me
It looked me dead / in my eyes, / which struck me / like a poem / It crossed the road,
weaving between / cars speeding by / It turned / and looked back at me/ for just a
moment / Then it bolted / It's tail / waved / like a white flag / And then / it was gone

T(h)eam Five: "Tension"

One of the only rules for audience members of the haiku deathmatch is that they are not allowed to make any noise in response to the delivered haiku. Many hosts appoint the role of an honorary "shusher," whose duty is to aggressively shush audience members who laugh and applaud. This tension, of course, only makes the haiku death match funnier and more energetic. Many audience members of the haiku deathmatch spend the match snorting through the fingers clasped around the mouth. If audience members want to laugh at a haiku, they are allowed to practice "one hand laughing," and audience members will silently jazz their hands and wave their palms at the poet onstage.

As writer Dean Young (2010) said, "Poetry occurs between primaries, the page and the mind, the world and the word. More than a thing it is a transference of energy between poles." The tensions between subjects, objects, and the world are evident in the writer's use of language because, as Young claimed, the two reasons we write are "to be understood" and "to be misunderstood." The author used the example of painters who craft realistic images by juxtaposing delicate brush strokes and broad swipes of paint, which serves as a metaphor for the frictions that writers feel when using both grounded and fantastical language to convey truths. The tension between documenting and sensualizing phenomena in writing is felt in poetic inquiry too, because as Galvin and Todres (2009) claimed, "As we are qualitative researchers, our particular sense of closure is most likely to occur when there is a balance between 'telling' and 'showing'" (p. 313). The authors referenced Seamus Heaney's (1995) quote "Poetic form is both the ship and the anchor" to essentially show that poetry as a vehicle acts as an engine and weighted referent in the process of inquiry. Since poetry acts both as a guiding force and a way to reflect, the dialogic tensions experienced by the writer almost make a circular motion, like the way a record on a turntable returns to its original standpoint through the process of revolution.

The t(h)eam of *tension* is ever-present when considering the harms that face arts and education communities. Hull (2003) claimed that a major obstacle facing literacy-related school programs is an economic climate where funding for extracurricular clubs and special events are being cut and a political climate where teachers must focus more class time on improving testing scores. While collaborative teaching is almost always ideal in a spoken word pedagogy classroom (Fisher, 2007), a number of educators traversing collapsing school districts have found they must fulfill multiple roles that used to be occupied by a collective of experts. Rather, poets and educators have a lot to learn from one another: poets can help teachers develop a more comprehensive view of the stories taking place in their school (Cahnmann, 2003), while teachers can help poets learn some of the best practices for the classroom.

The second way to look at *tension* is to consider the dissonance that occurs when young people use a populist artform to work through the ways they are impacted by the very education system they are supposed to conquer. Clay (2006) argued that by staging publicly the work being written in institutional spaces we inherently make visible the systems of power that affect how our voices will be received. Public literacy gives participants a chance to counteract these systems of power by literally challenging the spaces they currently occupy, which can create tensions between powerful structures and vulnerable people. Kelly argued that poetry can be a way for young people to reconcile their true self with the self they are prepped to be in institutional learning spaces—because when we refuse to include hip hop culture in the classroom, educators encourage students to adopt duel literacy identities where they are hip hop-identified outside the classroom but not inside the classroom (Kelly, 2013).

The first chapter of the *tension* t(h)eam is called "On Fast, Loud Things," and uses poetry written about the Indianapolis 500 to consider the tensions between the academy and "popular verse." The second chapter, Eustachian Tube Dysfunction, is a poem about learning to bring

earplugs to hip hop and punk rock concerts. The third chapter, “Be the Bread,” details my attempts to help the Southern Fried Poetry Slam become more inclusive to poets with disabilities. The final chapter, “The Fourth Floor,” is a prose poem about the institutional bureaucracy of hosting summer camps on college campuses.

On Fast, Loud Things

In which the poet: remixes an interview, two poems, and a newspaper clipping to craft an autoethnographic narrative about the tensions between the academy and "popular verse."

1. The March

Though "Race Day" can be a blur for a lot of attendees, there is one vivid memory I recall from my first Indianapolis 500. On the Sunday before Memorial Day every year, hundreds of thousands of IndyCar fans flock toward the same colossal racetrack in the Speedway neighborhood of Indianapolis. The image is like a biblical depiction of exodus, but with more sunglasses. I can recall my first march to the track: I had more than a mile to go when my arms started feeling like they would dislocate from my shoulders. I sat my cooler on the curb and rotated my right cuff, envious of the people who knew better. Thousands of people flowed past me with wheeled coolers and insulated backpacks. It was a rookie move to think I could carry a 12 pack of beer in a Coleman portable cooler all the way from my car to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. I transferred the cooler to my left arm, but both were starting to feel like pool noodles. Funny as it may seem, memories like these encourage me to reconsider my conceptualization of illiteracy. We often think of literacy as something confined to books, but it is also about reading the world around us (Freire, 1970). According to Merriam-Webster (2020), illiteracy is defined as "the state of not knowing how to read or write," but it also means "the state of not having knowledge about a particular subject." I had never been to the Indianapolis 500 before, but I had read about its lore. Despite my studies, I still lacked enough knowledge to know that carrying a loaded cooler multiple miles was a yokel move.

I learned to be literate in all things Indy 500 the hard way, but it could have been worse. Fans who aren't prepared to "read the signs" can get a sunburn or heat stroke. They can get lost or trampled in the crowd. There is a specific skill set that must be learned to make it to the finish line. This might be a simplistic viewpoint, and yet, there are thousands of things to "read" among

the sea of people swimming toward the track. The sign that says "Earplugs 1 dollar" held by the woman selling wares on the street corner tells us the world we are walking into is really loud. The banners flying behind the airplanes advertise insurance companies, which tells us we are going to see danger and think about our own safety. Cultural meaning can be gleaned from ripped-sleeve fashion choices and American flag bandanas. There are messages to read in the postures and the gestures of the people around me, and in the noises emitted from their bodies. The Indy 500 is a place to give strangers high fives and pump your fist in the sky. The Indy 500 is a place to shout "whoo!" and chant "USA! USA! USA!" The brazen celebration of lewd excess and campish patriotism can be jolting the first time you are surrounded by it. One person walks by with a shirt with a bald eagle, with a caption that says "Back to Back World War Champs." I see another shirt with cut-off sleeves, with a graphic of Abraham Lincoln wearing sunglasses and a tank top. The caption below reads: "End Sleevery."

"You see every kind of human being there," my friend said, when I interviewed him a little less than a year later. "It's the single largest one-day sporting event in history." It was January of 2016, and we were sitting at his kitchen table. It was four months before the historic 100th running of the Indianapolis 500, and the Host Committee had partnered with Indiana Humanities to sponsor a writing contest. The official call asked poets for submissions to become "The Official Track Poet of the 100th Running of the Indianapolis 500." The contest sounded weird. It was a quirky opportunity to engage the public with poetry, so I decided I would submit.

Clearly from my cooler story the year before, I had a couple things to learn about the Indianapolis 500. So I decided to set up a meeting with my friend—a self-professed "track rat"—to see if I could glean some of his experiences into writing material. The pomp and havoc of Race Day can be hard to describe in nuance, but I wanted to respectfully represent all the people there. I wanted to focus on the spirit of the people, and steer the focus away from cheap images

of military pageantry and toxic nationalism. I had just started learning about a process called "poetic inquiry" (Prendergast, 2009), and thought maybe this project could be my first attempt in turning an interview transcript into a poem. When I started the recorder, I asked my friend what some of his favorite images were from his years of attending the race. He spoke about attending for the first time as a kid, watching the race while gripping the fence with his fingertips. He spoke of his tradition of slapping the tunnel ceiling while walking toward the infield. He spoke of all the wild people he's seen over the decades, who "love fast, loud things." I wrote the following poem, dedicating it to him and all IndyCar fans:

For Those Who Love Fast, Loud Things

This poem is for the track folk who just love the smell of Ethanol.

For the Carb Day cut sleeve sporters, the Snake Pit dancers,
and Coke Lot campers with bald eagle bandanas.

This is an anthem for the hearts that've surged at the scope of the Pagoda.
For the hands that know the feeling of slapping the North Vista tunnel ceiling.
For the lips that whisper along with Florence Henderson when she sings,
yes. This poem is for the 500 fans who love fast, loud things.

The hot dog chompers and buttermilk sippers, and
granddads with ledger pads in suede cases and locked zippers.

This is for every kid that's stood along the stretch—with toes
on top of a cooler and their fingers gripping the fence.

For the open-wheel gear heads, parade wavers, and Legends Day fans.
For the moms smeared with baby sunscreen changing diapers in the stands.

This poem is for the Brickyard pickers, marching band
clappers, the bucket drummers and gasoline alley cats.
This is for the pit crews, the announcers, the flyby pilots in the sky.
For the girl who'd never seen her dad cry until the day Dan Wheldon died.

This poem is for the *Andy Griffith* neighbors, the binocular
watchers, and the concession yellers hawking cold brews.
This poem is for every shoulder with a Memorial Day tattoo.

This is for the drivers willing to go bumper to bumper, for the flag
flappers, and the earbud-in-clutched palm fist pumpers.

> This is your poem Indianapolis, taking the turn with direct injection. Race fans, thank you for being the sparks that start the engines.

2. The Victory Lap

There is a question lingering in the air: what does a poem about a car race have to do with literacy and education? The answer lies in the tension between the literary canon sanctioned by the academy and "popular verse." Somers-Willett (2009) explained that the institutional power of the academy frames the public's conceptualization of poetry, even when a verse is composed or recited outside of a school setting. She said, "Even at poetry readings, where literary critics are apparently absent, the ghost of their tastes and judgements linger in the minds of poets and audiences. In such cases, academic and popular verses form a dialectic; one comes to influence the very definition and evaluation of the other." (p. 41) This is why many notable spoken word poems focus on topics from "popular culture" (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005): sports, video games, comic books, horror movies, and hip hop. Some poems lampoon popular celebrities and explore using social media as a lens to see the world. These examples of popular verse could be framed as "unsanctioned literacies," because institutional stakeholders often posit such poems as a threat to the "real poems" that are celebrated in the academy (Moje, 2000).

On April 28, 2016, the Associated Press (AP) published an article entitled, " Shall I compare thee to a carburetor? Indy 500 gets a poet:"

> INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — An Indiana University student who is a poet and a performer has been named the Indianapolis 500′s first official poet since the early 20th century.
>
> Adam Henze of Bloomington beat out more than 200 others who submitted Indy 500-themed poems for the contest co-sponsored by Indiana Humanities.
>
> The competition revives an Indy 500 tradition from the 1920s, when an official poem was included in the race day program.
>
> Henze is an educator and a doctoral candidate at IU. He receives a $1,000 cash prize and two tickets to the 100th running of the race on May 29.

> His poem is titled "For Those Who Love Fast, Loud Things." It will appear in the official race program. Henze also will read his winning poem at the Speedway during qualification weekend.

The article hit the AP wire while I was teaching a public speaking class at a university. I had to assign my students a random writing assignment so I could email a photo credit to a journalist. My phone and laptop screen were dinging with notifications, and I tried to keep my focus on my lesson plan. I ended up letting the class out fifteen minutes early, as the calls and texts kept coming. By the end of the day, the story had been picked up by The Japan Times, Fox News, USA Today, X-Games, Business Insider, and The Seattle Times. The story was even picked up by alt-right publications I typically lambast on the mic, such as The Washington Times and Breitbart. I began feeling a major tension: on the one hand, I felt sickened to have my name featured in newspapers that have sympathetic leanings to white nationalism and anti-establishment. On the other hand, my story encouraged a neo-conservative rag to dedicate a small space to poetry. That is something transformative, is it not?

I thought the student news and maybe a local paper would cover the story. But over the next month I was inundated with requests for interviews for television, radio, podcasts, magazines, and newspapers. I conducted six interviews for NPR programs alone. A racing magazine in Hungary published an article about how my beard gave me magical poetry powers. These "fast, loud things" began invading my life to the point that I asked for incompletes in some of my classes. I struggled to keep up with grading papers and my tasks as a researcher. Over a million people heard my poem over the span of a couple weeks—meanwhile I was beginning to stress eat and drink heavily just to make it to the end of the semester.

The same topic came up in every interview: "isn't it wild that there is poetry at the Indy 500?" And my answer was always, "no!" There are television celebrities singing ballads at the victory podium, old rock stars jamming at Carb Day, and emcees rapping in the Snake Pit. The

"Greatest Spectacle in Racing" is historically represented with many turns of phrase, such as "Gentlemen, start your engines." Cultural tradition is passed on through symbolic images, like cold milk and victory wreaths. One of my final interviews was with the late Bill Littlefield, of WBUR's *Only a Game*. Their segment was dedicated to the history of poetry at the Indy 500. Ninety-five years before I was crowned the "Official Track Poet," an Indiana journalist named William Herschell was commissioned in 1921 to compose poems for the Indy 500 race program (Littlefield, 2016). His tenure lasted eight years before the Great Depression forced the Indianapolis Motor Speedway to cut costs. Like the introduction to this chapter, his 1923 poem, "A Race Crowd Rhyme" also described the mass pilgrimage to the track:

> Hearts feel a thrill as the grandstands fill
> And motors and sirens roar:
> Eyes scan the pits for favorites—
> The heroes of years before.
> Nerves tingle, too, as the hour comes due
> For the marathon to start;
> A "Good Luck!" prayer pervades the air
> And echoes in every heart.

The article also interviewed Indiana poet Jared Carter, to give some analysis of Herschell's poems. He clarified, "These are popular poems. These are not artsy poems. And yet he is a skilled writer. There's no question. He employs every poetic device there is, practically, to make them smooth, readable, legible and lots of fun." The article revealed another tension to me regarding popular verse. One the one hand: popular verse penetrates the bubble of the poetry audience and engages the greater public—some who don't even like poetry. On the other hand: without a dedicated readership and influence of the academy, the notoriety of a popular poet can vanish like William Herschell. Are popular verses "fast, loud things" too?

The more I learned about Herschell, the more I related to him. According to Hostetler (2014), Herschell "was a large friendly man who wrote features and verses about a variety of topics including depot station masters, the ruffians in Brickville, public service workers,

charming children, and the common man" (p. 3) He was known for goofing off at the office, yet he somehow used to churn out a prolific amount of writing (Boomhower, 2020). He was a dedicated laborer, and participated in the strikes organized by Eugene Debs' American Railway Union. I asked Bill Littlefield if I could read Herschell's most famous poem, "Ain't God good to Indiana." The poem confronts the fallacy that Indiana lacks what other states don't. It is a poem that makes Hoosier country visible, in its descriptions of our scenery and spirit. Even the racially problematic language is representative of Indiana—a blemish in the poem that reminds us of the lasting blemish in our history. The poem is chock with the tension of escape from this place.

Ain't God good to Indiana?
    Folks, a feller never knows
Just how close he is to Eden
    Till, sometime, he ups an' goes
Seekin' fairer, greener pastures
    Than he has right here at home,
Where there's sunshine in the clover
    An' honey in th' comb;
Where the ripples on th' river
    Kinda chuckles as they flow—
Ain't God good to Indiana?
    Ain't He, fellers? Ain't He, though?

"Ain't God good to Indiana?
    Seems to me He has a way
Gittin' me all outta humor
    Just to see how long I'll stay
When I git th' gypsy feelin'
    That I'd like to find a spot
Where th' clouds ain't quite so restless,
    Or th' sun don't shine so hot.
But, I don't git far, I'll tell you,
    Till I'm whisperin' soft an' low:
Ain't God good to Indiana?
    Ain't He, fellers? Ain't He, though?

"Ain't God good to Indiana?
    Other spots may look as fair,
But they lack th' soothin' somethin'
    In th' Hoosier sky and air.
They don't have that snug-up feelin'
  Like a mother gives a child;

They don't soothe you, soul an' body,
With their breezes soft an' mild.
They don't know th' joys of Heaven
Have their birthplace here below;
Ain't God good to Indiana?
Ain't He, fellers? Ain't He, though? (Herschell, 1919)

3. The Pagoda

One of the most iconic images of the Indy 500 is the pagoda: a colossal structure that has been a fixture of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway since 1913. The renovated tower is approximately 160 feet high and includes 13 stories ("Pagoda offers best view of Indy," 2002). When I showed security my VIP pass, I felt like Bruce Lee in *The Game of Death*, who must ascend a pagoda by battling a boss on each floor. I wondered if there would be powerful foes in this pagoda too. The Pagoda suite was filled with politicians, wealthy businessmen, and local celebrities. I felt out of place, so I mostly hung out with the bartenders and wait staff.

It was finally time for my big moment, and I was led onto a staircase to the Victory Podium, a space usually reserved for champions. My poem was written on a stack of index cards. My fingers fidgeted with the corners. My heart was a revving engine. When I stepped onto the platform, I took in the scope of the 253 acre track. The behemoth venue is large enough to hold the Vatican City, Yankee Stadium, Liberty Island, the Taj Mahal, Church Hill Down, The Rose Bowl, The Roman Colosseum, and The White House inside it (Mack, 2018). It dawned on me that this may be the largest venue for a poetry reading in the history of the world. Though the stands were not as packed as they would be for the race, qualifying day still brought out thousands of fans. My lip quivered as I spoke the first words of my poem. My own words echoed, emitting from speakers literally miles away. When I finished my poem, I heard the faint sound of applause coming from every corner of The Speedway.

When I went back inside one of the bartenders said she saw me on the podium, and asked if I would perform my poem for them. "Yes, absolutely!" I beamed. She excitedly gathered the

other bartenders and servers, and I was humbled to share my words for the people who fixed my drinks and food. They smiled and applauded as I spit my poem at the bar. A man with slicked-backed hair and a loud green jacket tipped his glass and nodded at me. One bartender gave me a free copy of the race program—a gift from the wait staff. Performing for my new friends was absolutely the greatest part of this month-long rollercoaster. We served each other. We gave each other gifts. We had different things to offer, yet we spoke in harmony.

When I turned around, I realized I was surrounded by people with platinum hair and shiny clothes. The man with the loud green jacket was there.

"Do the poem," he said. This was not phrased as a request. He must have seen my facial expression shift. He said, "This is the George family," alluding to me that they were related to the owners of the track. "Do. The. Poem."

While surrounded at a minibar in the VIP section of the Pagoda, I gave the most dispirited poetry performance of my life. It took everything I had to enunciate the words, so I would not choke on them. Everyone clapped their quiet rich people clap and then went back to their rich people business. I headed toward the door, feeling like the gum on the bottom of someone's shoe. In a matter of moments, I had gone from being King-for-a-Day to the courtyard jester. Something to snap your fingers at. A dancing monkey. With the racing program in my hand—featuring the Official Poem of the Indianapolis 500—I exited the pagoda, to rejoin my friends in the cheap seats, where I belong.

Eustachian Tube Dysfunction

In which the poet: writes a poem about punk rock, hip hop, and the ringing in his ear.

1.

When doctors stick
an otoscope inside
my ear canal
they always gasp then
gather themselves.

Some say the scars are
something of a marvel.

They nod long
like they're pondering
all the songs I've
only heard in parts.

2.

Mom says she just
can't do punk because
it's hard to hear the lyrics.

She hisses her esses and cees
and pressure is building
inside my orbital cavities.

I learned to headbang as an
honest attempt at disruption.
A nod to shift the
liquid inside my left temple.

3.

My ears don't really ring.
They are rattled amplifiers
emitting fuzz and muffled pops.

It's all screeching frequencies.
Drum skins straight up busted.

At hip hop shows I lean
into the beat because I
know about nodding along.

Be the Bread

In which the poet: remixes audio transcripts from two interviews, two focus groups, and an email, to write a narrative about fostering inclusive poetry spaces.

The greatest performance poets in the United States were gracing the stage in a performance hall just three blocks away, and I was in a gas station buying cases of over-priced bottled water. The host city organizers had booked individual finals, team finals, and the afterparty of our poetry slam in the same historic venue, which means that hundreds of our festival guests were packed into the same room for seven hours with no access to drinking water. The host city promised that food trucks would be available for patrons. I, along with the other board of directors, had pressed them to get signed contracts, but they swore up and down we could trust their word. Then the trucks didn't show. There weren't even vendors selling snacks and alcohol, and for a poetry festival that is both 1) a buzzkill and 2) a lost opportunity for revenue. No refreshments at an afterparty, in a poorly circulated space with hundreds of bodies.

It was a "perilous situation," said Shadow, the director and CEO of Southern Fried Poetry, Inc. I asked the head of the host city committee how he planned to rectify the situation. He shrugged. He felt like his job was done. Earlier in the day I overheard him mention that he forgot to get event insurance for the finals venue, if that is any indication of his level of commitment. So, when faced with an ultimate systems breakdown, I did what any decent Vice President of an organization would do: I left the venue mid-bout, got in my car and headed to the closest place that sells drinking water. I didn't get to see a single poem that night.

Allan Wolf, founder of the Southern Fried Poetry Slam in 1992, created a mantra for poets to live by. "If you're not being fed… be the bread." I once asked him what this means, and he said, "The idea is to take charge and create your own abundance. You will fill your own need, and have abundance to share. You add to yourself by giving yourself away. You feed your soul by opening your soul to others." I have been the bread for Southern Fried in a lot of ways, but

that day being the bread meant buying a pallet of bottled water with my personal credit card. The "bottled water problem" had me thinking of the more we needed to give to the patrons of Southern Fried with disabilities. Just how accessible is our festival? Can we guarantee safety to everyone who attends?

There are some obstacles facing the Board of Directors in ensuring the accessibility of Southern Fried. All of the board members are volunteers, and have limited control on which venues the host city will pick (the board has the ability to veto non-ADA compliant venues). Many of our venues take place in Southern historic cities, with loose guidelines on wheelchair access for their doors and walkways. We often host as many as five events at a time, and it can be a challenge to help patrons transport themselves from venue to venue. Most of our patrons are working class artists from out of town, who rely on public transportation or rides from friends. All of these issues are compounded by the scope of our tournament, which has ballooned in the past decade. The tournament used to take place in one venue, and featured four teams of poets. Today the festival is a 4 day event hosting hundreds of poets, in half-dozen venues across the city. An article in The Chicago Tribune suggested that the National Poetry Slam had similar growing pains: "What was once chaotic and tough has now become a marvel of organization, rules and specialties" (Obejas, 1999, p. 3). Despite the fact that Southern Fried has failed to expand the scope of its organizational infrastructure, "The slam is a marathon now" (p. 7)

The initial reason I decided to pursue a doctoral degree is because I wanted to be a researcher for my community. I was already concerned about the accessibility of our tournament, and I thought a way for me to "be the bread" as a researcher would be to collect some data from participants who would be comfortable talking about their challenges with mobility. The same day as the "bottled water problem," I interviewed two poets at the annual picnic: a woman named Nightingale and a man named Axiom. Both had temporary injuries. Axiom had a boot on

one foot, while Nightingale had to travel from venue to venue with one leg resting on a scooter. We joked about how their predicament made it hard to strut up to the stage. There are easily 100 other people in the room, squeezing past us and patting us on the shoulders. It is objectively loud in the space, completely ruining the audio recordings. If I can't conduct an interview in this literary space, then what must it be like for someone prone to sensory overload? If slam is a marathon, what does that mean for those who can't run?

Event organizers often conceptualize disability access in two limited ways: as ramps and microphones. The building of our finals venue was ADA compliant, and there was no shortage of microphones on stage. But the incident told me that there is much more to consider. A few days after the tournament ended, a patron of Southern Fried posted on their social media:

> I started feeling really shaky and lightheaded during Indies final stage… thanks chronic illness... and I really worried that I would have to leave to go get food or something.

Her name is Antoinette, and this was her first time at Southern Fried. I reached out to invite her to an interview, because I wanted to ask her how we could do better serving the needs of patrons. She explained to me there was a combination of "contributing factors to her not feeling well." She says social anxiety "keeps a fear" in her that she needs to "check and control." Antoinette has a chronic illness that causes nausea and pain, which was exacerbated by the 27 hour drive to the tournament. A lot of the meals are rushed and a lot of her peers stay up late partying. "My body doesn't work that way," she said. Antoinette said she didn't know Southern Fried would be the marathon it is, and had she known she would have communicated her needs more clearly. She gave me several suggestions to implement in future tournaments. She suggested making a low-sensory area available to patrons at finals, and selling basic snacks like crackers, chips, and fruit. She also suggested that we could facilitate meetups for folks with social anxiety or disabilities, so shy patrons can form friendships with other poets with similar needs.

I also wanted to talk to my friend Khalisa Rae, who has been attending Southern Fried since 2011. She sustained an injury and decided not to attend Southern Fried that year, because she was concerned that 1) the festival couldn't accommodate her, and 2) her peers might not be thoughtful about her needs. She said one thing she has learned about disability is that sometimes you are just forgotten if you can't go with the flow. "I work harder if I want to go places," she said. Khalisa said it is also important that festival organizers consider and respect the mental health of patrons when picking venue spaces. She said, "I think our jobs as participants and organizers is to create a culture where boundaries are not abnormal. Where boundaries become the norm. Where we listen to you; we respect you; you voice those boundaries; and then that becomes our new normal." She said it is important for participants to feel empowered to vocalize their needs, seek out systems of support, and feel comfortable setting clear boundaries.

Khalisa's perspectives on boundaries trouble the common notion of accessibility, because she said "sometimes accessibility can be dangerous." She said a harm of hosting a festival of notable public artists is that some strangers have "too much access" to details of their personal lives, such as their finances and intimate relationships. She said, "As a woman, I've seen things go awry when boundaries aren't set." Years before the #metoo movement rocked Hollywood and the recording industry, poets began using their social media profiles to discuss sexual predators in the slam community (Johnson, 2017). She said, "Southern Fried and these festivals can be microcosms of what happens in real life." When I asked her why boundaries are so hard to talk about in our community, she said it is hard to hold someone accountable when we have put them on a pedestal. She said spaces will truly be accessible when women feel safe in them.

Khalisa Rae troubled the "mics" and "ramps" conceptualization of accessibility by pointing to the intersections of race, gender, class, and mental wellbeing. "It is all interwoven," she said. It is clear that the issue of disability and accessibility necessitates dissertations worth of

further research. There are more miles to cover in this marathon. In the meantime, I wanted to play the role of emcee and kick off the conversation. The data I collected during these conversations are invaluable to Southern Fried, and I shared my findings with several members of the board and other influential stakeholders. I wanted to document somewhere in my dissertation that I have been giving thought to what "being the bread" means. To help guide my next steps, I asked advice from Allan Wolf about his mantra. He sent a thoughtful email back to me, and I added line breaks to a section to create a poem called "Leave Room for the Reader."

> The basic truth of it is that we lift ourselves
> by lifting others. When you write a poem,
> even if you write it for yourself, leave room
> for the reader. If you are feeding yourself,
> make enough for others too. For the sustenance
> comes in the doing for others. It takes hubris to
> create art, or be a leader, or love someone.

The Fourth Floor

In which the poet: remixes two audio interviews and a poem, to construct a prose poem about the intersection of bureaucracy and burnout at Slam Camp.

I was interviewing a student at Slam Camp, when counselor Cuban Hernandez wandered over to our quiet corner of the student dining hall. Lunch time was one of the only moments during the week where staff could sneak away to handle professional affairs, and I had seen him pacing on the phone outside our space. My student was talking with me about her school, when Cuban stepped forward and said, "They just fired this guy." His face was red and he was shaking his head at the phone in his hand. "They just fired our Executive Director—gave him zero notice he was being fired." Cuban was checking in with his job back in California, where he'd spent a week of vacation days to come to camp. Cuban is the director of camp programming for the organization, but apparently no one had consulted him about firing his new supervisor. "When you break your back for an organization, you deserve better." He paused. "I know I deserve better." His stance shifted, and he lowered his eyes. "I don't feel secure *at all* in my position."

> "Can I give you a hug" I asked.
>
> "Yeah I would love that," he said, resigned.

A recognizable skill that Cuban shares with many of the teaching artists at Slam Camp, is an uncanny ability to mentor youth while mitigating disaster at home. In all his years working at Slam Camp, I've overheard several such phone calls. One year his basement flooded, and he had to track down maintenance for his complex from 1000 miles away. One year his sublessors sold his dog while he was away, and he hashed out that disagreement in five-minute increments over the course of the week. The previous year, Cuban's mother had passed away, but he had to keep teaching despite his devastation. He wrote a poem called "gift" about teaching through adversity.

> Because my scars
> are so fresh
> it makes my glow
>
> brighter, my hugs
> tighter, my care
> considerate
> focused on the quietest
> voice, mumbling through
>
> a song God hummed
> while making dinner, snapped
> "Not yet"
>
> like testing a battery

with your heart

Her spirit
in everything
I cook

How God
held my hand,
carried a scent

like a seasoning.

Sierra DeMulder, our co-director, used to say "Slam Camp is sick." What she meant is that Slam Camp asks its counselors to give too much of themselves. Counselors must be on call 24/7 for an entire week, and are often paid less than they typically make for a fifteen minute reading. On top of this, counselors must navigate the brutality of bureaucracy. There is a literacy of university legalese a lot of poets don't speak. A misunderstanding might mean a missing check in the mail.

University rules dictate that temporary employees cannot drive off campus to pick up medicine from the drug store. One time two counselors arrived to campus after driving hundreds of miles—administrators made them get back in the car and head to the social security office for replacements cards. Artists are not without systems and processes. As Soef (2005) claimed, "artists are caught up in a continuous process of assessment, in which they design, apply, and revise standards for themselves and their medium." (p. 40). The literacy of liability is not the same as the literacy of accountability. Who is liable for the poets, who've given all they have?

We hosted camp at three different universities, and for whatever reason, our conversations always seemed contentious with the fiscal folks on "the fourth floor." One year a teacher mailed me a check to pay the tuition for two students in need. I put it in my backpack, and the Department Administrator and I walked it over to Conference Services while enjoying a cup of coffee. The next day we received a blistering string of emails and phone calls. "I didn't know at the time that was a mistake," she said, with wet rings under her eyes. "There is a policy of checks with the university where you have to have a courier take them from building to building. I had no idea about that, because I had never been an administrator before. Nobody had told me." Since I was a student, the blame shifted to her. For me, a scolding. For her, the start of a spiral.

She said one day she had to make a decision: "I am going to fight for Slam Camp." She stood up to the fourth floor when they complained that kids were laughing and cheering too loud. She gave in different ways than the counselors, but it was still a gift. Between spreadsheets and permission slips, she talked one student out of a panic attack in the bathroom by her office.

She said Slam Camp “is about connecting children with adults who understand them.” Understanding can be a shared love of poetry. Or it can be a familiarity with beratement and bullying.

One year it was me on the phone: navigating disaster. Sierra, a student, and I were picking up a van from a rental agency while my dog was being put to sleep on the other side of the country.

I sobbed while signing paperwork and wiped snot with my t-shirt sleeve. My student fixed her gaze forward, but she watched me in the periphery. What lessons did she learn from me, in terms of love and leadership? Was my signature shaky when I signed my name to the dotted line?

T(h)eam Six: "Associative Logic"

Hosts of poetry events often hire hip hop DJs to play songs as poets enter and exit the stage. Some poets request a specific "walk up song," like they are professional wrestlers in a huge arena. DJs who are good listeners often select the exit song based on themes presented in the precluding poem. Audience members with good ears can catch the clever ways that poems affect the mood of the music. This is just one example of how *associative logic* is used at poetry slams to add layers of meaning to poems.

As Gloria Anzuldua (1987) once said, "An image is a bridge between evoked emotion and conscious knowledge; words are the cables that hold up the bridge" (p. 91). The cables that Anzuldua referred to serve as a metaphor for the ways that artists use the comparison of images to reveal truths about the world. Miller (2004) claimed that the remix adds to the associative logic of hip hop texts through the introduction of pattern and repetition: "That's what mixing is all about: creating seamless interpolations between objects of thought to fabricate a zone of representations in which the interplay of the one and the many, the original and its double all come under question" (p. 33). Miller's comment suggests that associative logic does not only act horizontally between things, but also between dueling representations in time, space, and in a more metaphysical sense.

The haibun of Matsuo Bashō is interesting to analyze when considering the different ways that poetry uses associative logic. A remixed form of sorts, *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Greene & Cushman, 2012) called haibun an integrated form of 'pleated text' using haiku and prose. Sometimes the form "may be as brief as a single terse paragraph followed by a single haiku" while other times the verse portion may appear "in a linked series, between prose passages" (p. 592). Haiku and haibun often feature what's known as a "cut," which

disrupts the flow of images and invites the reader to provide multiple interpretations for the ways the two images are juxtaposed. According to Shirane:

> The important part about the cut, the kireji, which cuts the two parts of the haiku is that it leaves the poem open for the reader to complete. So, it's like the linked verse. You have one verse, the verse is basically unfinished. The next person has to complete that by adding a verse. The same thing happens within the bounds of the haiku, or the hokku. The two parts are sliced in half, and there's an open space which the reader, the audience, is supposed to enter into.

The shift between prose and haiku serves as an additional cut, as there is not always a clear link between the two sections. Though the parts often stand at odds, Ueda (1970) claimed that Bashō "thought of prose and poetry as complimentary, as two modes of writing serving a single aim" (p. 112). The Poetry Foundation described the divergent forces for haibun in a different way, suggesting that images in the poem follow two paths: "the external images observed en route, and the internal images that move through the traveler's mind during the journey" ("Bashō," 2016). While haibun is described as a "self-contained text," the various ways the texts exhibit associative logic enacts "a kind of dialogue" between images, devices, sections, and perspectives, which presents a "compounding of points of view on the same situation or topic" (Hirsch, 2014).

Associative logic in poetry pedagogies refers to notions of bipolarity and ways of metaphorical thinking, and the first harm regarding associative logic points to the ways that poets are often maligned, misunderstood, or unfairly associated with counter-culture. Weinstein and West (2012) suggested that some of the structures of youth poetry slam also fall in the societal trap of promoting binaries, particularly because competition and celebrity can reinforce more toxic discourses that slam is assumed to stand against. They claim that "the media gaze" refocuses public attention on competition over craft, which negatively impacts youth because they begin to associate successes based on their rankings or inclusion on a team, which arguably undermines the pedagogical goal of dequantifying educational spaces. Other gatekeepers unfairly

assume that a hip hop-identified student may automatically be associated with delinquency (Low, 2011), which is another example of the ways poets can be unfairly labeled or compartmentalized into convenient boxes.

An important thing to consider in the t(h)eam of *associative logic* is the notion of duality that artists entrepreneurs face in that their artform and skillset is deemed both priceless and priceless. This dichotomy is felt by youth poets too: Weinstein and West (2012) found that one challenge young writers face is that their successes may not be valued significant outside of slam spaces, and their interviews suggest that teens who've graduated from spoken word pedagogy programs can still face challenges related to succeeding in higher education or their careers. Hull (2003) challenged scholars to consider ways that multi-literacy-focused spoken word pedagogy can in fact help rectify this dichotomy by considering "the linkage between the desire to acquire new skills knowledge and who we yearn to become as people" (p. 232). In short, poetry's perceived break from labor creates a set of attitudes which undermine its value.

In keeping with the t(h)eam of *associative logic*, the first chapter, "The Circle" is a poem about facilitating a literacy circle in a maximum-security women's prison. The second chapter, "Winding Road to West Yorkshire," tells the fragmented story of visiting schools in Yorkshire, England, in the form of a Japanese haibun. The third chapter, "On Schemes and Tropes," discusses the role of metaphor in telling stories in Poetry On Demand. Finally, "Eagles" is an autoethnographic narrative about using poetry in inclusive classroom settings.

The Circle

In which the poet: writes a poem about restriction and reciprocity.

Tonight Hela reads a poem to
the son she's accused of killing,
and Amora says she wishes
she could become that brave.

I say, let's start with where
this poem is successful.
Not to overshare, Emma says,
but that's the type of writing
that makes your butthole pucker.

Yuriko disagrees with Audre Lorde:
She says poetry has to be a luxury
when you only get to sip it once a
week with your commissary Pepsi.

Once two students were kicked out
of the course for humping each other
on a stolen tarp in the chapel staircase.
CO's combed through every poem
wondering where they learned that at.

Each class I shake every hand
because maybe I sound like the
last man who reprimanded them.
Not to try to sound scary, I wince,
but Missus C says she'll shut us down
if you're in the hall without the pass.

Raven escaped from prison once and
worries she doesn't have any stories
good enough to share. In the circle
sometimes you start crying when
you stumble over a line.

I made you a painting, Elektra says,
pointing at the hues out the window.
She shakes her head at the power lines
like why oh why oh why something
manmade got to fuck with my sky.

Winding Road to West Yorkshire

In which the poet: writes an autoethnographic narrative about his visit to five schools in West Yorkshire, in the form of a haibun.

> "The moon and sun are eternal travelers. Even the years wander on. A lifetime adrift in a boat, or in old age leading a tired horse into the years, every day is a journey, and the journey itself is home."
>
> — Opening lines of *Narrow Road to the Interior* by Matsuo Bashō

Green. Tidal waves of green splash across plunging hillsides. Tall grass and rhubarb plants. Sounds of bleating sheep and wind bawling past passenger window. Endless wall of stacked stones rush by outside, beside street signs I don't always understand. *What's a Zebra Crossing?* Jenny titters at my pronunciation, insisting *Zebra* rhymes with *Debra*. On this winding road we're once again at risk of launching into our umpteenth argument on the pronunciation of *aluminum* and *controversy*. Appropriate time to consider Bashō's haiku:

> This road—
> no one goes down it
> Autumn Evening

Walking to the front office with bag slung over shoulder, I say *it's a misconception that haiku must have seventeen syllables*. Jennifer's eyes are elsewhere, looking toward four days from now when the school term ends. A fortnight shy of August. The office manager asks, in her Yorkshire accent, *Are you the American?*

Yippee ki-yay, I say with a smirk. I tell her today is the first of five visits to secondary schools in Bradford and Leeds. *I teach poetry.* My fingers fidget with the visitors pass, the lanyard string taut against my neck. Like a coy fish perhaps, fighting the line of a fisherman whose bare soles brace against the pier. But maybe more closely to Rodney Dangerfield. Or a deep sea diver, taking on water in their helmet and yanking the pull rope.

> Kid sits in hallway
> tugging on uniform tie
> head buried in hands

The classroom is packed with young writers, all shifting in their seats. Waiting their turn to speak. Girl with Jamaican braids hugs her knees, scrunched up in auditorium seat. Boy with upper-lip stubble mumbles to himself reading poem he's kept in front pocket. Eyes hide behind hair. Fingers flip through pages of journals to find favorite verses to show me. I write the word *haibun* on the board in black Sharpie, and put on my proverbial academic cap for the class:

> *Today we're writing a form of poetry called 'haibun,' created by a Japanese poet named Matsuo Bashō around 1682 (Hirsch, 2014). For Bashō, writing was about capturing images along the journeys you find yourself taking. As Hirshfield (2015) claimed, "A wanderer all his life, both in body and spirit, Bashō concerned himself less with destination than with the quality of traveler's attention" (p. 52).*

Road of the writer
The path of those who've served a
samurai who died

According to The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics (Greene & Cushman, 2012), haibun is an integrated form of 'pleated text' using haiku and prose. Sometimes the form "may be as brief as a single terse paragraph followed by a single haiku" while other times the verse portion may appear "in a linked series, between prose passages" (p. 592)

Stark image and cut
Good haiku should make you go
'ah…' 'ha!' or 'ah ha!'

While conventions of the form have been debated for hundreds of years, for me a good haibun conveys a story through vivid imagery, almost like a travel diary or ethnographer's field notes. I try to remove descriptions of my feelings, hoping my inner state is primarily conveyed through the way I paint the landscape. The interlocking passages should each stand alone, and are not always linear, though a progression of time is often conveyed through the cut between paragraph and poetry.

Have any questions?
Raise your hand if you need help
Hope brave souls will read

The timer set, their eyes start searching the ceiling and walls. Eyes turn toward each other, and see graphited sneakers and neon blue hair. Eyebrow rings and skinny jeans. Skin and sass and laughing teeth covered by palms. Then the students bow their heads, and they move their pens. A looping trek down blue rows of narrow roads.

Though grimy freestyles
switch up the flow, the beats on
desk still sound the same

After reading Chaucer in the A-level class, I talk with a girl wearing Poké Ball earrings about the *Bioshock* stickers on her laptop. I tell her when she becomes an adult it's easier to be the kind of nerd she wants. She smiled like no adult had ever said something like that to her before.

Among the teachers
and students in the hallway
three men in black suits

Inclusion classroom, Key Stage Four. Jennifer's students show me drawings they've made. Hands waving like the middle of an *Iron Maiden* concert. Knees on chairs and pacing feet on floor. To meet the energy in the room I become Tennyson's *Eagle*:

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,

Ring'd with the azure world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

We grasp our fingertips into flinching claws. We peck the air with our noses and spread our wings wide. We are birds of prey with eagle eyes. Soaring. Falling like thunder.

Window in staff lounge
New teacher bites her nails and
watches the playground

You have an accent, a blonde boy says, sounding to me like a tightened guitar string. *Yeah, well I think YOU have an accent*. He is not convinced. There are 200 or so students, sitting on every surface of the library. Lone mic stands near the book return, an image of hometown Indianapolis projected onto the wall. These are the questions British kids want to ask Americans: *do you know Channing Tatum personally? Do you like KFC or Burger King better? Do Americans have favorite football clubs? Have you ever been to Florida or New York or California?*

When a girl asks if I own a gun, I stand silent, not quite sure what to say. How to tell her some students have faced the floor, know the coldness of metal on the back of their brain. I say in Indianapolis folks fire pistols into the sky on Fourth of July. When the strays fall it is not always earth that they find.

Café worker winks
and ladles extra beans on
my golden fried chips

It is Ramadan. My cabdriver offers to cook me a meal in his home even though he cannot eat until sundown. I thank him and say *maybe later*, wishing my voyage could be longer. When we arrive at the school, I see the tail end of a jet engine sticking out of the building. When I get inside I learn the school offers a vocational flight attendant course. The building is small. Cafeteria and two classrooms. Class of five and I sit crowded around a circle table. A fasting girl stares down at her paper. A teen says he wants to write about his dad throwing him out of the house, unless he can think of something even sadder. His friend says she wants to write about learning to stick her fist in her mouth to nudge her uvula. A girl tugs her skirt. Every time her pen comes close to touching the page, she withdraws it like a hand that got too close to the coils on a stovetop.

Two boys with shy smiles
holding hands under their desks
Told parents last week

The school I visit Thursday, the students are not allowed to talk in the hallways. The walls are lined with columns of silent kids. The detention veteran I am, I fight the urge to shout curses in the corridors.

Trying to keep up
with the Yorkshire Tea drinkers
toe tapping in class

In an all-girl school, my workshop with Uzbek refugees stalls like an airplane in turbulent wind. I slow my speech and wave my arms wide, but I only succeed in looking like an idiot. Girls in black jackets and acid washed jeans shrug at me. One student speaks with the bilingual aid, who scribes her sentences. The girl furrows her brow, like a baker kneading bread with flat hands. When writing time is done she has described her whole house. The garden in front and the giant red door. All her uncles and aunts, mom and baby brother, and new kitten with the gray striped face. As the aid reads her poem in English, the girl sighs and smiles, like someone who had to walk a real long way to school.

Girl wearing hijab
laughs with friend in black boots and
Nirvana t-shirt

End of week youth open mic. Darkened school theatre with lancing spotlights. It's always rewarding to see a teenager hold a microphone for the first time. Some hold it like a hatchet. Others like a wand from some fantasy novel. Some steel-fist grip like hip hop misfits. A young girl reads her work for the first time, her stammering hands like shifting tectonic lands.

Students wave and ask
if we can beatbox later
then turn and walk home

Summer sun sinks into evening. Teachers with traveled feet and loosened collars. I'm thankful for my friend Jenny: without her hospitality I would be adrift in a boat, a moon with no sun to circle. Pints and pudding await us over the next winding hill. Rain drops pepper the windshield. The path ahead is covered with petals of white roses.

On Schemes and Tropes

In which the poet: uses two poems to construct a hybrid narrative about assumption and association in the Poetry On Demand writing process.

One of the challenges of fostering an arts scene in a college town is the revolving door nature of the populace. Many of the artists and organizers are longstanding staples in the community, while a lot of the patrons are only there for short tenures as students or visiting scholars. I've noticed that some patrons are alumni, who treat their trek into town as a yearly pilgrimage to their old "stomping ground," and you can depend on them to visit your event maybe once a year. If you are intent on building a consistent following, you have a few precious years to hook your neighbors in before they cast off toward other waters.

This creates a fleeting feeling about many of the relationships you develop in these towns. It's a feeling that many share but is hard to describe, and often people turn to "wordsmiths" like me when language is found to be lacking. I found clarity in a project called *The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows*, a compendium of words created by artist John Keonig, who has spent a decade "pinpointing and defining emotions many people have felt but haven't been able to communicate" (Dalton, 2015, p. 3). My favorite word from the dictionary describes a feeling I have experienced many times, watching people while sitting at my typewriter in the middle of an arts festival. The word is called "sonder," and it is defined as:

> *n*. the realization that each random passerby is living a life as vivid and complex as your own—populated with their own ambitions, friends, routines, worries and inherited craziness—an epic story that continues invisibly around you like an anthill sprawling deep underground, with elaborate passageways to thousands of other lives that you'll never know existed, in which you might appear only once, as an extra sipping coffee in the background, as a blur of traffic passing on the highway, as a lighted window at dusk.

One day a young man approached our Poetry On Demand tent, and asked me if I would write a breakup poem for his girlfriend. I have gotten requests like this before: someone is not happy with their current circumstances, and asks me to write a scathing narrative peppered with

alliterative quips and cuss words. No, he explained to me. This was different. They both just graduated, each earning undergraduate degrees last week, and were taking job offers in different states. They loved each other, but not enough to deviate from their dreams. He had stopped by the arts festival on the way to helping her pack the last of her belongings.

I pulled out my journal, and started asking questions about their life together. My method here was to search for "tropes" to construct the poem around. In rhetoric, tropes "are figures of speech with an unexpected twist in the meaning of words" (Mitrovic et al., 2017, p. 267). Common tropes in poetry include "metaphor," "simile," and "onomatopoeia." As I interviewed the young man, I wrote the images and sounds he mentioned, and I thought about ways to twist them into a trope. He told me they shared their first kiss on campus, at a space sanctioned by tradition, where my own parents kissed years ago. The two lovers are both ambitious, hard-working people, but they would often stop all the busyness to share a cup of coffee together in a little boutique. He said her favorite word is *sonder*, and he asked me if I knew what it means.

Suddenly, I had the trope I needed for the poem.

I wrote a poem called "Sonder," about an ephemeral love, that is both precious and precarious. I changed the woman's name to April here, a name for a month of poetry and new beginnings. The poem reads:

April, we floated
on fleeting moments.

Two passersby, living vividly,
finding bliss in the meeting
of a kiss at midnight, at Rose Well,
lips whispering I love you,
a first fluttering utterance.

We are both bundles of dreams,
different direction, same stream,
with brief stops off in a coffee shop,
sipping hot chocolate and lattes.
I've found that sonder has

a slurping sound sometimes.

A life of winding roads,
dinners, tailgates, this ode.

When you pack your bags tomorrow,
there will be no guilt, no love lost,
no feelings of obscure sorrow.

April, thanks for the fleeting
moment of "mine," for the nights,
for being the love of my life at one time.

When the man returned to our booth, I read him his new poem. His eyelids started spilling over, and he asked if he could give me a hug. "She's going to love this," he said. He said he was going to read it to her over the weekend, and then hold her close one last time. He said he would reach out to me on social media. He left with the poem in his hand, and I never heard from him again.

Though *The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows* is filled with numerous definitions about murky states of being, author John Koenig (2016) provided some explicit context for one of his most popular words, "sonder." He explained how the concept of sonder related to his decade-long search for the words that are missing in our lexicon:

> And about halfway through this project, I defined "sonder," the idea that we all think of ourselves as the main character and everyone else is just extras. But in reality, we're all the main character, and you yourself are an extra in someone else's story. And so as soon as I published that, I got a lot of response from people saying, "Thank you for giving voice to something I had felt all my life but there was no word for that." So it made them feel less alone. That's the power of words, to make us feel less alone (p.6).

POD is an abrupt repositioning of the relationship between extra and main character. Strangers step out from the background scenes of my life, and approach me to tell their most vulnerable memories. Then for fifteen committed minutes, I make an extra the main character of my own life, and I try to tell an important story using words they recognize. The best I can do is listen intuitively to the protagonist of the moment, and think about how I can translate their

compounded memories into a clear poem. Whose story does the poem end up being? Does it become my story? Is it still entirely their story? Do we share it equally, or is it like 60:40?

Sometimes I have to coach participants in the interview, because their descriptors are meaningless when expressed as a poem. I remember interviewing a very drunk woman at an arts and music festival, who wanted me to write a poem about the friend propping her up at the moment. I asked her to tell me more about her friend.

> "She's awesome."
> "She's amazing."
> "She's great."
> "I love her."

With no image to twist into a trope, I struggled to turn the slurred interview into a poem of any type of merit. When the friends returned, I read the poem with as much enthusiasm as I could muster.

"That sucked!" the patron blurted out when I finished.

Her friend saw that the comment clearly hurt my feelings, and apologized profusely as she escorted her away. The woman wasn't entirely wrong: the poem did arguably suck. But my feelings were hurt for a different reason. I was hurt because our projected outcomes did not align: I wanted to have a shared experience with a stranger, and work as hard as I can shaping that experience into an artifact worth holding onto. She wanted a "good poem." Though it is rare for someone to express such insistent dislike for the final product, we do not typically grant refunds for poems deemed "not good." Patrons are not paying for a good poem. They are paying for my time and labor. They are paying a dedicated wordsmith to work as diligently as I can to make a number of assumptions, hoping to construct something that resonates within the unknown murkiness of the person I just met. Once at a music festival, I wrote a poem for a man's wife, and I saw him throw it in the trash. When he was gone, I rushed over the barrel, and I held my breath as I fished it out from the bottom. I can't say the poem was a "good poem." I can't say

that it belongs on someone's refrigerator or in an old jewelry box. But I can say it had more worth than the trash in the bottom of that can.

There is a great tension between speaker and subject when it comes to conveying emotion, which even extends outside the realm of artistic representation. As Aja Monet (2017) wrote in her poem "Footnote" (which consists of a blank page and a three line footnote):

*the way emotion work / we exist between / a self for self and a self for others

Many patrons of POD have an emotional story they want to tell, that isn't always given space in their lives because they must exist "for others." They have to put on a smile, and tuck their obscure sorrows away for another time. The same is true for poets too, who often commit themselves to the maxim of "the show must go on." As soon as I finished writing a poem about sonder, I had to write a poem about a couple's cat, who thinks he is a pirate. Though there is a shared catharsis in producing a poem, it still takes an emotional toll on the poet to exist for the other, and not solely for the self.

I was still thinking about the "Sonder" poem a few weeks later, when I was sitting with a typewriter at a different festival, in the same small college town. When you are a poet, it is hard not to carry the baggage of extras who have unexpectedly become main characters in your life. All poems about loss linger a little longer than poems about pirate cats. What new burdens would I help shoulder that day? A man approached our booth, and wanted to know what this typewriter thing was all about. When I told him about POD, he told me he was getting married later that day. Could I possibly write a poem that he could read to his new bride?

I took out my journal, and listened to the man's story of meeting his fiancé. He told me they had a long-distance relationship, and that she was "honest," and "loving," and "caring." I challenged him to push past these abstractions and speak in concrete terms—we needed a strong image, vivid enough to capture the energy of the moment. I learned that he is a cyclist, and she is

a ballet dancer. He said he fell in love with her while sitting in the audience and watching her dance on stage. He told me that the biggest impact she has had on him is teaching him to think about his carbon footprint. Now he recycles and upcycles and eats more sustainably.

I wrote the word "footprint" in my journal. I had our trope. When he left, I began to write a poem about two people learning to dance delicately together on a shared earth. There is always a moment in the POD composition process when I switch from writing a draft with a pen in my journal, to typing the final product on the typewriter. It is during this transfer between scratched notes and sculpted poem that I play with the "schemes" of the piece. In rhetoric, "schemes are figures of speech that deal with word order, syntax, letters, and sounds, rather than the meaning of words" (Mitrovic´ et al., 2017, p. 267). "Alliteration" and "anaphora" are both popular schemes that commonly appear as patterns in poems. For twenty minutes I shuffled the sounds of words in hopes of sculpting a poem as decadent as a wedding cake. When the man returned, I read the poem that was commissioned for his bride:

Slippers (for April on her Wedding Day)

It takes strength to
do the delicate dance.
I learned to love you
while watching in the audience.
Your determined footwork
said you would stay stepping,
and I knew I wanted to
make movement with you.
I have lived my life in
cycles of not seeing you.
Late night texts and
booking plane tickets
just to encircle your space,
see your ballet slippers
settled in the dinner chair.
When we dance tonight, April,
I won't let my feet shuffle.
I want to step delicately,
live lightly with you, and
leave the least footprint.

And when the day is done,
we'll kick our soles
to the corner and fit
our feet in comfy slippers,
and stare out the window,
wondering where our
future steps may lead us.

I handed the man the poem, and he held it like the paper had suddenly become more expensive or delicate. For one sonderous moment, we as strangers shared a bold story worth telling. We took a photo on my smartphone: we stood shoulder to shoulder, smiling, and he held the poem in his hand. He promised me that he would reach out to me to tell me what his partner thought of the poem. And then he walked away, and I never heard from him again.

Eagles

In which the poet: uses a left-behind sheet of paper to write an autoethnographic narrative about the inclusive nature of spoken word pedagogy.

A dozen kids thump-thump-thump their way up the staircase and find their seat in a folding chair. I pass out journals and pens at each table, donated by a woman with a business in the same neighborhood as the community center. Some of the kids in the room are teenagers, and some are just ten years old. When I facilitate a workshop for a group of varying ages and experience, I often find myself returning to the fundamentals. These are approachable assignments, that task participants to pick up an easily employable skill. Traditional schooling can frame poetry as a cryptic, irrelevant practice (Lerner, 2016), but with accessibility in mind, anyone can write a poem. This is why I am determined to encourage everyone in the room to fill the first page of their journal, on the first meeting of our weekly after school program. After performing a poem for my new friends, I ask them to write a "shout out" poem.

"You guys know what a shout out is, right?" I ask. "It's like when a rapper gives props to a friend on a track. Or like, when an actor thanks their agent in a speech, or if a football player thanks a higher power on camera after a touchdown." A shout out poem is formally known as an "ode," or a "formal, often ceremonious lyric poem that addresses and often celebrates a person, place, thing, or idea" ("Glossary of Poetic Terms," 2020). But I don't really care if they know the official-official term. I care that poetry is a recognizable and relevant thing in their world.

The students start writing shout outs to all the people in their lives. One poet writes a shout out for the grandmother that raised him and his little sister. One poet writes a shout out to the boy in her class that she is afraid to speak to. One poet even writes a shout out to their bully, an imagined conversation where all the power is leveled.

Everyone is writing, except one older student sitting in a corner. Her posture is slumped, closed off, and a volunteer at the center sits next to her. I see that her page is blank, so I crouch down next to her and ask where what's wrong.

“Nervous,” she mumbles.

“Nervous?” I ask. “You’re nervous?”

“Nervous,” she nods, clutching her necklace with her hand. “Poem,” she says.

“You’re nervous to write a poem?”

“Poem,” she answers. I notice that the emblem on her necklace is the shape of an eagle. She tugs on it as she squinches her lips together.

I write a word vertically across her blank sheet of paper:

E
A
G
L
E

I don’t know why she has an eagle necklace, but it seems important to her. Something to cling onto when she is a little bit scared. I ask, “can you think of a word that describes yourself, that matches each letter?” I point to the letter “A.” “Like this letter could stand for awesome. Because even though I don’t know you yet, I can tell that you are awesome. Can you think of some more words that describe how awesome you are?”

The girl smiles, and the aide sitting next to her nods at me, as I turn to check on the rest of the class. One kid tells me he can’t spell, and I tell him not to worry about that so much. When I return to where the girl is sitting, her page is filled with a poem, all written in wavy letters:

Excited
Awesome
God
Love
Empowerment

Some of the letters are squeezed between others, where perhaps a helpful aid reminded her where the letters are supposed to go. The girl sits with a smile on her face, like she just received an invitation to a party in the mail. Though her poem is only five words, it tells me an immense story about her. I met her as a quiet kid in the corner, but now I know better: she is an awesome, excited follower of God, who has love to share and possesses the tools to her own empowerment.

Anyone can write a poem.

Epilogue: Reentry

In which the poet: stitches a string of narrative threads together to consider some implications.

There Are Mornings

Even now, when the plot
calls for me to turn to stone,
the sun intervenes. Some mornings
in summer I step outside
and the sky opens
and pours itself into me
as if I were a saint
about to die. But the plot
calls for me to live,
be ordinary. Inside the house
the mirrors burn when I pass.
— Lisel Mueller (1986)

On March 29th, 2020, the Southern Fried Poetry slam was cancelled for the first time in the 28 year history of the festival due to the outbreak of Covid-19. In our letter to patrons—which I authored myself—the board of directors explained that we "held onto wishfulness as long as we could" but we had to consider the safety and wellbeing of our community. As I explained in the letter, concerns about transmission of the virus were compounded by the fact that many of our patrons lead precarious lives, without health insurance or access to affordable medical care.

> The board and host city are also thoughtful of how this pandemic will impact poor and working class artists. Southern Fried is already a financial strain for attendees and organizers alike. We know that Southern Fried is so special that many of our attendees scrape together what they can to make it there, opting to skip meals and sleep on the floors of hotels. We have a duty to support the most vulnerable members of our community, and this includes our economic well-being, as well as our health. This is a time to support and uplift one another in different ways.

Poetry has informed every aspect of my professional practice—including my decision making process in canceling an arts festival in a pandemic. I was worried patrons would be upset, and accuse us of overreacting. I thought we might have a public relations fallout. I thought they might congregate without our guidance and host an unsanctioned event. I wanted to connect

to our constituents and cut through the legalese to speak to them through the heart. Just like my favorite poets taught me: I asked questions and left them open-ended for the audience to answer.

> What is a Southern Fried where we can't shake hands, hug, and hold one another? Could we trust ourselves to practice safe social distancing rules around our loved ones? Would we as organizers be able to live with ourselves if even one of our festival attendees got sick or died?

A poet named Timothy "Urban Thoughts" Moore posted a message in the Southern Fried social media group, which he gave me permission to share. The post said he was celebrating his first year anniversary from beating Leukemia. He said despite being immunocompromised, he was going to attend because he couldn't let "that damn Corona" keep him from "family." He wrote that even though he was disappointed, "I am grateful that the Board cares about me to make the decision for me because I was going to come and risk it." Though people mourned on social media, in the end, no one criticized our decision to cancel Southern Fried.

Nearly every part of my life as a poet was disrupted in a matter of days in March of 2020. All the poetry slams and community center workshops were put on hiatus. Several of my Poetry On Demand gigs and readings at museums and libraries were cancelled, resulting in thousands of dollars of lost income. The speaking tour I had started booking in the UK and United Arab Emirates was postponed. College campuses, elementary, and secondary schools all shutdown, and jails and prisons in the United States faced a full-blown crisis within their walls. Even the Indianapolis Motor Speedway announced they would be postponing the race after the typical Labor Day weekend (Brown, 2020). My dissertation defense, which I originally planned to stage in a grand lecture hall, was moved to my kitchen via a Zoom conference call.

What lessons should I share with you here? The literacy spaces of all the participants featured in this dissertation now face the uncertainty of collapse—all within the span of a few missed paychecks. The coronavirus has exposed the true precariousness of our institutions in the United States (Packer, 2020), and it is impossible not to speak to the needs of stakeholders with a

new sense of urgency. Though I will speak to the specific implications of this study in a moment, it is important to say here that all stakeholders of arts and education communities deserve economic rights (Tharoor, 2020). All deserve a living wage (Meredith, 2020) and access to medical care (Abrams, 2020), affordable housing (Dillon, Poston, & Barajas, 2020), and the internet (Ulloa, 2020). All deserve access to mental health services (North, 2020), and stakeholders with disabilities deserve access to proper systems of support (Wong, 2020). All laborers deserve to work in an environment where they will not be marginalized, mistreated or assaulted for their race, sexual orientation, or gender identity (Zhou, 2020). The key to surviving a post-Covid world will take a radical imagining of our society (Lichfield, 2020), and equitable change is needed within institutions of learning (Strauss, 2020). We as a society must abandon a culture of high stakes standardized testing and shift to a culture that values art and humanities education (Barnard, 2020). We must transform higher education institutions into spaces that are accessible by all, where students won't face a lifetime of debt for a four-year education (Patel, 2020). If educational institutions and the greater public want to continue to consume art, then it is necessary that the artists and curators of arts spaces are justly cared for in return (Witt, 2020).

The reality that artists and educators must plan for in 2020 is to operate in spaces that have not yet been conceptualized. It is uncertain what schools and performance spaces will look like in a post-Covid world, which poses a unique challenge for proponents of community-centered pedagogies. Given the murkiness of the future, I have decided to present two series of implications: implications for poets, and implications for poetry. My intent is to connect these implications with findings from Parts II and III of this dissertation and present suggestions for stakeholders wishing to foster their own poetry communities.

The reader may be asking themselves: where are the implications for educators? And researchers? And especially students too? What implications pertain to them? If it hasn't been

made clear in this dissertation already, this group of stakeholders *are* the poets. There is no world where researchers or educators are studying poetry from afar without diving in. Like Winn found (Fisher, 2007), outsiders who attempt to engage with spoken word communities as observers are often transformed into "participant-observers" through the discursive nature of poetry. There were many participants in this dissertation who took the "dive" (Gibson, 2005) into poetry: my administrator friends who don't consider themselves artists, for example, and my teacher friends more invested in promoting creativity among their students than nurturing their own. All of them were welcomed into "the circle" as active participants. All of them engaged with poems and shared lived testimonies. Furthermore, all my colleagues I connect with at literacy research conferences read poems—they write poems. They live poems by attending poetry slams and by following their favorite artists on social media. When I speak of the needs of poets I also speak of the needs of the educators, researchers, and organizers who set the stage for poetry and plug the mic into the amplifier.

And while this dissertation specifically vocalizes the experiences and worldview of poets, there are countless other artist educators that this dissertation advocates for. Choir teachers, band directors, debate coaches, and so many more professionals face the same reality of budget cuts and institutional collapse. If Covid-19 has taught artists of the world anything, it's that we are all interdependent on one another as a collective community. I asked poet Scott Woods if I could share a poem of his to illustrate this point. He said it's more of "a busted paragraph," but as the reader may realize by now: I don't really care if it is a poem.

> The poet must take care of the musician.
> The musician must take care of the painter.
> The painter must take care of the dancer.
> The dancer must take care of the novelist.
> The novelist must take care of the filmmaker.
> The filmmaker must take care of the actor.
> The actor must take care of the cook.
> The cook must take care of the poet.

Implications for Poets

The lives of every participant in this dissertation was disrupted by Covid-19. Yet, I am endlessly inspired by the hustle of my friends and peers. Big Mike has been learning how to make YouTube videos of his poems, so he can share his work asynchronously with his students learning at home. Asia and Bluz have been hosting viral poetry events, giving access to audience members who live out of the region from live events. Too Black and his peers started a podcast, which gives him the opportunity to learn a new medium for expression. Writers who wish to sustain their social capital in a time of social distancing must learn to navigate the digital world, and poets unfamiliar with the logistics of virtual events can turn to youth to lead this shift. Learning the perspectives of young artists is key because they have always had to navigate a climate of constraints and tight budgets. Writer Jia Tolentino explained the documentary film *Fyre Fraud* (Furst & Nasan, 2019), "The millennial understanding of the world has been shaped by extreme precarity. Now people want to construct their own reality." Writers my age and younger have faced an educational climate of a depressed workforce and institutional collapse, and as a result, we have already taken our words to platforms to craft a better world: Instagram, Tumblr, YouTube, Twitter, SoundCloud (Hill & Yuan, 2018).

The youth poets of Slam Camp and the young patrons of Poetry On Demand (POD) demonstrated an incredible level of tech savviness that taught me new methods for self-expression, and other adults could learn by trusting the youth in their lives too. It is important that administrators and institutional stakeholders see the value of arts-based virtual education, and support the initiatives of writing communities moving online. The principles mentioned in this dissertation are prime examples of administrators who provided an invested commitment to the poetry programming in their school. Colleges and universities can combat the criticism that distance learning is inferior by booking artists for virtual performances and workshops, and arts

and humanities organizations can support exploratory projects centered on digital expression. My experiences with FrankenSlam and The Indianapolis 500 show that innovative programming can be created if the sponsoring organization trusts their artists. If my data is any indication, prisons face the greatest obstacles moving forward. Stakeholders in the prison industry must recognize that a mass lockdown response to Covid-19 creates a dire need for access to virtual education, and it is important for them to invite educators, artists, and researchers to the table to help rethink the future of prison pedagogy.

However, some participants in this dissertation struggled to convert to the virtual world. As Mary Shelley once said, "Nothing is so painful to the human mind as a great and sudden change" (1831, p. 244). Tony tried a couple times to host an online POD session, but he said he missed the engagement of in-person conversations. With all his field sites shut down, Cuban said he is playing a lot of video games. We debated our favorite new releases, since I have been grounded from my sites too. Too Black made me promise to share his opinion that Covid-related unemployment services for artists are "bullshit" with a process that is intentionally broken by neoconservative design. He said as artists, "We grow used to cancellations but we're not used to any government assistance." On social media Ebony posted a photo of a huge theater marquee featuring her face all lit up, and the name of her show in big letters:

THE GODDESS EXPERIENCE: September 6, 2020

Her caption to the photo read:

Only time will tell what dreams may come but I will dream on…

At some time we as a society will return to a world of shared spaces and public performances. There are lessons to learn from this dissertation that might help stakeholders think about the logistics of sustaining future poetry-related literacy spaces. First and foremost, it is important for poets to have a "squad" of peers with differing literacy skills—which I call (s)kill

squads. For example, at Southern Fried I have relied on the skills of my friend Sincere, who is also often tasked with writing letters. Though we share duties, we have different voices: we often lean on her skills when we need to be methodically professional, and mine when we need to be sentimental-in-earnest. The necessary skill set of each squad shifts depending on the space, be it classroom, crowded bar, prison rec room, or festival tent. At POD I often take the lead and ask patrons if they are willing to donate money for a poem. When a typewriter breaks down, we ask Tony if he knows how to fix it.

Having a good "(s)kill squad" is particularly important for spaces involving youth. Winn (Fisher, 2007) provided a set of four "soul models" in her study of teen writers in the Bronx: 1) a "master teacher," 2) a "executive director of a nonprofit organization," 3) a "poet and documentary filmmaker," and 4) herself, a researcher. All members served as co-teachers and participated in the communal process of poetry. Winn also gave credit to a "parent volunteer turned school counselor" who served as an organizer and long-time supporter. Compare this group to the (s)kill squad that Mrs. Valor formed in my study, which consisted of 1) me, the poet and researcher, 2) her principal, 3) a local librarian, and 4) herself. The events depicted in "Teaching Without Shackles" and "On Staging Trauma" also show the benefits of collaborative planning, and suggest that youth can be "soul models" as well. The slam at the rural high school and the "shorty slam" at the elementary school in my study also show the importance of parent involvement and support from community stakeholders.

Now compare these successful (s)kill squads to my partnership with James, depicted in the chapter, "Lectures I Will Never Give." We lacked the support of non-artist stakeholders, which affected the consistency and sustainability of our program. While we both excelled as mentors, we faced logistical obstacles that could have been mitigated with additional support from soul models with differing skills. "Last Chance" is an example of a (s)kill squad who

lacked a stakeholder playing the role of a financial officer. This squad had a number of qualified educators, including talented visiting artists, yet we had no mitigator to help us problem-solve bureaucratic snafus. The frictions that stakeholders faced at Slam Camp and at the prison also point to the importance of fostering relationships with non-artist coordinators and administrators. This extends Whitman's notion of "great poets" needing "great audiences" Yes, we need engaged supporters in the audience. But we also need them to pass the collection plate and help stack chairs after the show.

Finally it is important to advocate for poets by establishing a proper etiquette for inviting them to a learning space. The chapters "On Culture and Costumes," "On, Fast Loud Things," "The Fourth Floor," and the "Epilogue" of this dissertation all explore the harms of fostering toxic relationships between teaching artists and institutional stakeholders. Calita revealed in our conversation depicted in "Ghost Stories" that she believed some educators feel anxiety about presenting "cultural programming," and experience a shutdown behavior I call "ostrich mode." Or there is Too Black's critique of "racial clumsiness" seen in "On Culture and Costumes," which speaks to the microaggressions that can occur between institutions and artists from minority communities. A solution lies in the foundation of spoken word pedagogy, because thousands of educational institutions have recognized the value of inviting a guest poet to their space to mitigate conversations about culture and inclusion (Fisher, 2007). Inviting a guest teaching artists can be an engaging way to foster community building, and can be an introductory step in building the professional relationships needed to make a (s)kill squad.

To give educators and organizers guidance on best practices for inviting a teaching artist into their space I will share a resource from Sara Holbrook and Michael Salinger (2006). The educators and slam veterans assembled a 22-item list of "Do's and Don'ts for hiring a Poet Consultant" in their resource book *Outspoken!* In addition to tips regarding classroom size,

hospitality, technical equipment considerations, and cross-curricular scaffolding, several of the guidelines address the etiquette for inviting a teaching artist to a learning space. For the purposes of topicality, I have whittled their suggestions into an abbreviated "Top 10" list related to implications of booking a guest teaching artist:

- Do consider hiring a performance poet to demonstrate the craft. One is good, a team can be even better. There are videos and DVDs available, but they don't do Q & A. Nothing is better to stimulate excitement than sampling the real thing.
- Do ask for references.
- Do plan the day in advance and let the poet know your expectations and let the poet know your expectations. It is fair to ask the poet to reinforce your lessons; it is not fair to ask the poet to "get the kids ready for tests."
- Don't assume the poet knows the school rules. Poets have a tendency to take that "free speech" thing very seriously… If you are having trouble broaching this topic, simply begin with the statement, "This is a school, we have to play by school rules in terms of language and subject matter. Are you OK with that?"
- Don't ask the poet to come for free. Here's the problem: no one appreciates free programs. They are toss offs and generally a waste of everyone's time… If you want to keep attracting cool programs to your school, do not develop a reputation for slow payment. If there is one group of people more poorly compensated than teachers, it is poets.
- Do remember the attitudes of your teachers will be reflected in the behavior of the students. If teachers believe the program is worthless, if they sit on the sidelines engaged in other activities or (worse) chatting, be prepared for the kids to feel (and act) the same.
- Do participate in all lessons. Do not let teachers just drop their kids in the assembly and disappear. Don't let them grade papers or have conferences in the room where the poet is presenting. This will send the wrong message to the kids about the importance of self-expression.
- Do follow up to reinforce the language lesson. What did the students learn? Where can these lessons be applied? Use the performance as a catalyst for writing and learning, not just for entertainment value.
- Do have a teacher or teacher aide in the room with the poet at all times.
- Do have students prepare questions for the poet in advance… Have every student write a couple questions about writing, poetry, performance, or books on an index card and bring them along to the assembly for Q & A.

Implications for Poetry

One thing that is made clear in my findings is that poetry can be a powerful vehicle for vulnerable learning communities. Many participants in this dissertation used poetry as a way to contend with traumatic stress and adversity. Poets shared heart-rending testimonies about systemic racism, sexual violence, suicidal ideation, food insecurity, and death of family. As a white, cisgender male in a afro-diasporic, multicultural arts movement, I attempted to explore the many intersections of the lived experiences of my participants. There are other stories of participants I wanted to tell and others I had to cut for the sake of time. I encourage the critiques of other stakeholders and scholars to point to what I am "missing." "Missing" as in "what is missing from this narrative?" "Missing" as in "where am I missing the mark?" Thankfully poetry has long been used as a force to uplift the testimonies of voices left out of dominant narratives. The intent of this dissertation was to use poetry to foster a shared conversation between many intersecting arts and education communities, and I welcome the cross-disciplinary dialogue this study will compel forward.

Eradicating harms as vitriolic as racism and misogyny will constitute a massive shift in the narratives of dominant cultures. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the implications for how poetry is conceptualized within institutions of power. To help guide this conversation, I turn to poet Nate Marshall's (2015) essay "Blueprint for Breakbeat Writing." The essay introduced a loose collective of diverse, hip-hop identified poets known as the "Breakbeat Writers," many who have graduated from the fourth wave slam scene into mainstream literary prominence. The essay critiqued the Eurocentric literary canon and reminded readers that it is the academy that needs hip hop for them stay relevant (and not the other way around). Marshall included seven assumed tenets of being a Breakbeat Writer, which I will apply to findings of this dissertation.

1. We believe in the necessity for poems to live in multiple media (page, performance, video, audio, various multi-genre presentational forms).

2. We believe in work rooted in a democratic cypher of ideas rather than privileging high intellectual or artistic pedigree. For us everything is on the table and equally valid until proven wack.
3. We believe in a foundational canon that is multicultural and multiethnic by definition and that celebrates and elevates the art and lives of people of color.
4. We believe in art that speaks to people's lived personal and political experience.
5. We believe in art that invites, acknowledges, and celebrates the voices of poor people and other disenfranchised people.
6. We believe in art that samples, steals, and borrows to create the most compelling and important work possible.
7. We believe in Ezra Pound's charge to "make it new" and/or Andre's revelation that "you only funky as your last cut."

The first tenet is *we believe in the necessity for poems to live in multiple media (page, performance, video, audio, various multi-genre presentational forms)*. From FrankenSlam to POD, every poetry community in this dissertation approached poetry education as a pedagogy of multiliteracies. As McDaniel (2000) said, "A spoken word venue is a literary magazine you can wonder into, where you read with your ears. The MC is the editor. The atmosphere is the typography. And whoever is onstage is the page you are on" (2000, p. 35 – 36). Participants such as Big Mike, Calita, and Mrs. Valor criticized the use of poems as fodder for standardized testing. As Ellis, Gere, and Lamberton (2003) claimed, "We think the problems teachers face with teaching poetry can be addressed by making its oral nature more visible and audible to students" (p. 44). The digital and analogue iterations of poems produced at POD suggest that a "playful" poetry pedagogy can help writers develop literacy skills needed to navigate antiquated machines as well as traverse new technological landscapes (Brawley, 1994; Harlan, 2008).

The second tenet, *we believe in work rooted in a democratic cypher of ideas rather than privileging high intellectual or artistic pedigree. For us everything is on the table and equally valid until proven wack.* The "democratic cypher" is most evident in relationships where youth felt empowered to engage as equal participants. In some instances, students took on the role as teacher and critiqued the values of adults—including me. As the adult in the room it sometimes hurt to check my ego, but such criticisms spoke to the democratic power of slam. As an

institutional gatekeeper, slam is not something for me to conceptualize on my own. As Woods (2008) claimed, "Slams are the embodiment of the idea that art belongs to people and not institutions or fashion-makers" (p. 19). By reserving space for "popular verse" in institutions of power, stakeholders make room for stories that are often not sanctioned in dominant narratives. Storey (2015) claimed that one way to define "popular culture" is to "suggest that it is culture that is left over after we have decided what is high culture" (p. 8). This definition demonstrates why pedagogies of youth culture are important in the context of traditional schooling, which often seeks to canonize texts of authors who students find unrelatable.

The third tenet, *we believe in a foundational canon that is multicultural and multiethnic by definition and that celebrates and elevates the art and lives of people of color*. The chapters "Ghost Stories" and "My Favorite Poets are Third Graders" are the most direct indictments against the Eurocentric literary canon, but many of the poems in this dissertation serve as counternarratives to works sanctioned by institutions of power. As evidenced in this dissertation, poetry can be used as a "work-around" to culturally-limited reading curricula. Tatum (2005) claimed that using shorter, "nontraditional texts" such as poetry can serve as bridges to longer texts that share themes about issues such as race and discrimination. The word "celebrate" is important to consider, because it is vital for gatekeepers to consider whether their nontraditional canon fetishizes the suffering and death of people of color. This is why celebrations like the Divedapper Poetry Carnival are necessary, because special events are reminders that poetry can showcase the spirit of life. The framework of "Hip Hop Feminism" (Love, 2012) enriches the conceptualization of hip hop pedagogy, leaving space for practitioners to both celebrate and critique forms of popular culture.

The fourth tenet, *we believe in art that speaks to people's lived personal and political experience*. This was most evident in the poems of participants who used poetry as a vehicle for

catharsis. Regardless of the space, many participants in this study used poetry as an avenue for intergenerational dialogue. Rudd (2012) claimed that spoken word pedagogy functions as a web that binds students together, which can simultaneously unify a classroom and give students the autonomy to vocalize their own passions through a shared discourse. As evidenced in the topics of participant-generated poems, many participating writers used their art to connect lived experience to political issues. Jocson (2011) claimed that performance poetry "encourages conversations that make explicit the asymmetrical relations of power based on various markers of difference, including, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, ability, age, and language" (p. 155).

The fifth tenet is *we believe in art that invites, acknowledges, and celebrates the voices of poor people and other disenfranchised people*. This tenet can be found across my dataset, from the discussions in the prison classroom to the poems heard at the Southern Fried Poetry Slam. Even narratives written by adult artists, like Too Black and myself, celebrate how we "got over" as poor working artists. Biggs-El (2012) claimed that artists from the hip-hop and spoken word community function as public pedagogues. These public grievances against systemic poverty and predatory capitalism are lodged "public forum of rap and spoken word" (Biggs-El, 2012, p. 162). Many participants adopted an exploratory voice in their writing, which guided a line of inquiry where writers questioned their positionality in the world. As Low (2011) found in her own study, "The spoken word curriculum was a place to air and, at its best, work through these tensions, leading to new insights and understandings for teachers as well as students" (p,1).

The sixth tenet is *we believe in art that samples, steals, and borrows to create the most compelling and important work possible*. Participants who used poetry to "remix" the discourses of elder authors also practiced a culture of "sampling, stealing, and borrowing." This occurred when students "flipped" Romantic poems in FrankenSlam and when "Mr. B" challenged his

students to write a better poem than William Carlos Williams. Rose (1994) stated that sampling the work of beloved artists "is also a means of archival research, a process of musical and cultural archaeology" As Eliot (1920) claimed in his famous essay "The Sacred Wood," "One of the surest of tests is the way in which a poet borrows. Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different" (p. 84). When learning communities promote the spirit of sampling they also instill the idea that students can become better than their predecessors. As Hugo (1979) once said, "If we creative-writing teachers are doing our job, we are learning from the students. If we are writers as well as teachers, we are also stealing from them, and they from us" (p. 54).

The seventh tenet is *we believe in Ezra Pound's charge to "make it new" and/or Andre's revelation that "you only funky as your last cut."* Pound the bard and 3 Stacks the rapper are referring to the notion of using language to forever adapt and "stay ahead of the game." In a culture where many people write off poetry as a snoozefest (Kaufman & Griffin, 1999), every poet in this dissertation somehow brought a fresh, new voice to poetry—whether it was Blaine's vintage postcards or Joseph's multimedia performance with family videos. By making it new, soul models promote the idea that poetry is relevant and applicable to the world. Duncan-Andrade and Morell (2008) claimed, "As educators, we need to do a better job of linking academic skills to our ideal model of the public intellectuals that we want our students to become" (p. 129). Stakeholders can meet this challenge by using poetry to practice adaptive literacy skills, particularly the skill of codeswitching. Emdin (2016) likened the ability to codeswitch to being a "social chameleon," with an emphasis placed on how language can be used to adapt to diverse social situations.

The Conditional

I decided to write this dissertation because my friends are dying. The Southern Fried community lost both Rage and Tess in 2019 alone, and I wrote letters for them both. Tavis slipped into a coma during my qualifying exams in 2016. The following Christmas break, when I was home with family, Bluz woke me up with a phone call to let me know that Tavis had died. He was laid to rest on New Year's Eve. I wrote a letter for Tavis too. All three were superstars of the slam community and all three died for health reasons while working as Black artists in the American South. I remember Tavis showing up one year with a breathing machine and Tessica showing up one year in a wheelchair: because they weren't going to miss their family reunion.

Now when I write letters for poets who have died, I treat it like a process of deep inquiry. I research news articles about their work and pore over their published literature. I search through their social media footprints and pluck out quotations that reveal their characters. I synthesize the words of my friends and sculpt them into proverbial crosses in the sand. I ask myself ethical questions, just like any other time I use poetic representation: am I allowed to speak for those who have lost their tongues? Do I need written consent from the dead?

My culminating moments of graduate school were spent in quarantine, during a worldwide pandemic. In isolation I asked myself: what role do us poets play as public intellectuals, in an era where our head of state is on television telling his constituents to drink bleach and inject sunlight. One night I felt lost while synthesizing my data, and I turned on a virtual open mic hosted by poet Aja Monet ("Homemade #3: Mayday May," 2020). Instead of focusing on my dissertation, I sat transfixed to the screen, finding solace in the words of Martin Espada, Staceyann Chin, and José Olivarez. Then when Ada Limón announced she would read her poem "The Conditional," I broke down and cried in my living room. She called it an "apocalyptic love poem." As I wept on the keys of my laptop, I chanted, "Bars. Bars. Bars."

Say tomorrow doesn't come.
Say the moon becomes an icy pit.
Say the sweet-gum tree is petrified.
Say the sun's a foul black tire fire.
Say the owl's eyes are pinpricks.
Say the raccoon's a hot tar stain.
Say the shirt's plastic ditch-litter.
Say the kitchen's a cow's corpse.
Say we never get to see it: bright
future, stuck like a bum star, never
coming close, never dazzling.
Say we never meet her. Never him.
Say we spend our last moments staring
at each other, hands knotted together,
clutching the dog, watching the sky burn.
Say, It doesn't matter. Say, That would be
enough. Say you'd still want this: us alive,
right here, feeling lucky.

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Appendix A - Narrative Threads

Thread One: Slam Camp. "Slam Camp" is an intensive academic summer academy for high school age poets, which has served over 200 youth poets since its founding in 2012. Though Slam Camp was initially sponsored by a partnering speech and debate program at a liberal arts college (setting 1), the program was eliminated by the college, which abolished our partnership and left the organizers searching for a new sponsor. For the fifth and sixth year, the academy moved to a much larger, public university (setting 2), where organizers had to take on bigger roles and faced more bureaucratic barriers. A majority of the analysis of this thread focused on the obstacles organizers and partnering stakeholders faced in making the camp sustainable, and how systematic forces strained the relationships between staff and students. The first narrative thread ended with a move to a third university and shift in leadership (setting 3). A primary focus of this thread was on the literacy processes needed to navigate barriers (or "red tape") when collaborating with large education institutions, and how the impacts of these communication gaps affect students, partnering stakeholders, and teaching artists.

Chapters featuring data from Slam Camp include: "Power Struggles," "New Spiel, Old Spiel," "On Culture and Costumes," "Your Heart Becomes a Starfish," and "The Fourth Floor."

Settings:	**Participants:**
1. A small liberal arts college in the Northern Midwest, USA.	· Five alumni (students or former students) in interviews, chat correspondence, and collected poems.
2. A large public university in the Central Midwest, USA.	· Two partnering stakeholders (administrators and organizers) in interviews and email correspondence.
3. A small liberal arts college in the Southern Southeast, USA.	· Two academy organizers (counselors or visitors) in interviews, email correspondence, and found data.

Thread Two: Southern Fried. The Southern Fried Poetry Slam is one of the longest running poetry slams in the world, and has occurred annually since 1993 at a rotating city in the Southeast region of the United States. The organization was informally founded by a group of artist friends in the early 90's, but the size and scope of the yearly festival has ballooned to hundreds of participants in the past 26 years. This growth, though successful, has put strains on volunteering organizers and impacted the quality of the tournament. Two significant things happened at the 24th festival in 2016: first, the collective body of representatives from each participating city (or "slammasters") voted to finally incorporate, electing an Advisory Council to steer the process of turning a loose collective into a national-scale 501c3-status nonprofit organization. Second, the host city organizer in North Carolina (setting 1), under no authority of the previously mentioned governing body, allegedly stole more than $10,000 dollars from the festival's budget (comprised of admission fees, awarded grants, and prize money), which jeopardized the future of the organization. A majority of the analysis focused on the communication between members of the Advisory Council, who underwent efforts to save the organization and host the 25th Anniversary festival in Kentucky (setting 2). The second

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">narrative thread ended with the incorporation of Southern Fried Poetry, Inc, the Council turning into a Board of Directors, and the efforts to implement new policy benchmarks organizing with the host city of the 26th annual slam in Texas (setting 3). A primary focus of this thread focused on the challenges artists and educators face when attempting to establish their own sustainable literacy-related institutions that offer arts and humanities programming for adults and youth.

Chapters featuring data from Southern Fried include: “The Ninth,” “On Security,” “On Daemons,” “Be the Bread,” and the “Epilogue.”</td></tr>
<tr><td>Settings:

1. 24th Host City in North Carolina, USA.

2. 25th Host City in Kentucky, USA.

3. 26th Host City in Texas, USA.</td><td>Participants:

· Three members of the Board in interviews, text exchanges, prompted poems, and transcripts of recorded meetings.

· Three festival patrons (poets, organizers, and attendees), in interviews, focus groups, social media posts, and prompted poems.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Thread Three: The Prison. Power of a Sentence is a weekly poetry writing and performance workshop series that takes place in a maximum-security women’s prison in the Midwest, USA. Though it began as a short-term summer series in 2014, the program has expanded into a weekly semester-long course, and has served over 300 incarcerated women. While Power of a Sentence shifted from a limited series to a weekly program, the partnering organizer in the prison became “gatelocked” (i.e. barred from the prison for breaking protocol), which presented numerous obstacles toward the execution of the literacy program. A majority of the analysis focused on the obstacles created by literal “gatekeepers,” and how spoken word pedagogy can serve to decolonize learning spaces connected to the school-to-prison pipeline. This narrative thread ended with the program being adopted by a sponsoring institution, providing possibilities for additional facilitators, a formalized curriculum, and the inclusion of more detention facilities. Since incarcerated literacy learners are a vulnerable population (no data will be collected from incarcerated participants), a primary focus is on the ethical concerns associated with using poetry to advocate for muted voices.

Chapters featuring data from the prison include “The Prologue,” “A Poem’s Worth,” “Spring Song for Justine,” “Access Denied,” “Hostage Scenarios,” and “The Circle.”</td></tr>
<tr><td>Settings:

1. A maximum-security women’s prison in the Midwest, USA.</td><td>Participants:

· One partnering workshop facilitator, in interviews, chat correspondence, lesson materials, and prompted poems.

· One partnering organizer, in interviews and e-mail correspondence.</td></tr>
</table>

	· One visiting teaching artist, in interviews and found poems.
Thread Four: Last Chance High. Last Chance is a pseudonym for an alternative high school in the Midwest, USA, which is attended by some students as an alternative to expulsion or incarceration. Last Chance is an example of an underresourced school that in many ways lacks the infrastructure to partner with artists in the surrounding community. A significant change occurred in 2017 when partnering stakeholders were awarded grants to implement arts and humanities programming. A majority of this analysis focused on the dynamics of partnerships between teachers and teaching artists, and examined the obstacles partnering educators faced when navigating the securing of public funding for educational initiatives. This narrative thread ended with the poetry pedagogy team finding institutional funding from a partnering university trust. A primary focus of this thread is how the implementation of spoken word program can stand at odds with a curriculum piloted by standardized testing, with attention being paid to the ways the poetry pedagogy team shifted the paradigm of the literacy space they've fostered. Chapters featuring data from Last Chance include: "No Hassle," "It Be Like That Sometimes," and "Mother Bears, Our Golden Shovel."	
Settings: **1.** An alternative high school in the Midwest, USA.	**Participants:** · Two partnering stakeholders (teachers and administrators) in interviews, email correspondence, and recorded classroom discussions. · Two visiting teaching artists in interviews and lesson materials.
Thread Five: Yorkshire. Since 2014 the activity of poetry slam has helped create a collaborative network between American teaching artists and British teachers. In my visits to Yorkshire, a summer educational program was implemented at one school in 2014, and expanded to five schools in 2015, as well as the formation of a TeachMeet symposium. A majority of the analysis of this thread focused on ways visiting teaching artists take on fluid insider and outsider roles (often referred to in anthropology as "emic" and "etic" perspectives). This narrative thread ended with the network going on a 2-year hiatus of programming, with many stakeholders of the network seeking employment other than the initial sponsoring school. A primary focus of this narrative thread detailed the transient lifestyle of teaching artists, and how misunderstandings and microaggressions serve as barriers to establishing sustainable literacy communities.	

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Chapters featuring data from Yorkshire include: “Writing Without Shackles,” “Ghost Stories,” and “Winding Road to West Yorkshire.”</td></tr>
<tr><td>Settings:

1. Five secondary schools in Yorkshire, England.</td><td>Participants:

· Two network collaborators (teachers), in interviews and chat correspondence.

· One visiting teaching artist, in interviews and chat correspondence.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Thread Six: FrankenSlam. A state-sponsored arts and humanities initiative in the Midwest, USA, FrankenSlam is a hybrid lecture and performance, that examines the oft-required reading through supplemental poetry texts spanning 200 years. Made available through a major endowment from the National Endowment of the Arts, FrankenSlam set the example of what a curriculum can look like when literacy education institutions and teaching artists are given monetary support and resources. A majority of the analysis of this thread examined the binary between “canonical poetry” and “spoken word,” with the amalgamation of Frankenstein’s creature serving as a metaphor for bricolage, hip hop literacies, and the fragmented nature of the dissertation study. This narrative thread concluded with the end of funding in the Midwest and the attempt to take the program international. A primary aim of this narrative focuses on situating pop culture and youth culture, making connections between literacy education vs. English education, and exploring how poetry can work as stitching to connect disparate communities and fields of study.

Chapters featuring data from FrankenSlam include: “Remixing Frankenstein,” “Spring Song for Justine,” “Ghost Stories,” and “Henry Clerval Scolding Victor Frankenstein”</td></tr>
<tr><td>Settings:

1. Four secondary schools in the Midwest, USA.

2. Two libraries in the Midwest, USA.

3. Two universities in the Midwest, USA.</td><td>Participants:

· Eight FrankenSlam attendees (youth and adult participants), through prompted poems.

· Two partnering organizers (educators and librarians), through interviews and email correspondence.</td></tr>
</table>

Thread Six: The "(G)local" Scene. The murkiest thread of the seven, the "glocal" (or the intersection of global or local) scene represents the literacy communities where the culture of hip hop and spoken word is constructed. I focused my attention on the literacy processes happening in bars, coffee shops, community centers, festivals, fan conventions, and even in the abstract spaces of social media and the internet. This thread was meant to be the glue that cements the pieces together, and focused on ways teaching artists from these places work to disrupt academic and educational institutions that may have previously rejected slam and hip hop culture. One recurring practice in this thread was a program called Poetry on Demand (POD), which occurred in multiple spaces. Other sites visited in this thread include 1) a rural high school, 2) an urban elementary school, 3) a community center 4) a college campus, 5) a poetry reading, and 6) The Indianapolis Motor Speedway. The (g)local scene narrative explored the economic landscape of the "gig economy," and emphasis was placed on ways teaching artists must commodify their work in order to achieve a sustainable state of living.

Chapters featuring data from the (g)local scene include: "Writing Without Shackles," My Favorite Poets are Third Graders," "Typos are Humane," "On Culture and Costumes," "On Staging Trauma," "The Poetry Carnival," "Lectures I Will Never Give," "On Popular Verse," "Eagles," and "On Tropes and Schemes."

Settings:	**Participants:**
1. Three poetry slams or open mics. **2.** Three hip hop concerts. **3.** Three arts festivals in the Midwest, USA. **4.** Two fan conventions in the Midwest and on the East Coast, USA.	· Twelve artists **(**who also work as teaching artists), through found poetry, interviews, related press, and chat correspondence. · Five stakeholders (event organizers), through interviews, related press, and chat correspondence. · Three event patrons (attendees) through interviews and focus groups.

Thread Seven: The "Hole." The most abstract of the threads, "the hole" represents the muddy events and spaces from memory that critical art educators revisit through the process of reflexivity. In prison or detention centers, "the hole" is conceived as an isolated space where unwilling participants are forced to "think about what they did." The "hole" in this dissertation served as a metaphor for outlying (or internalized) spaces that teaching artists turn to for critical reflection. Though the only actual participant of this thread was the author of the dissertation, the thread of the hole included "found data" (or data not solicited by a research team), such as archival history materials, album covers, found poems, found conversations on social media, found audio and video of poetry performances, as well as literary criticism and articles in the press about spoken word.

Chapters featuring data from Last Chance include: “Sound Off,” “Henry Clerval Scolding Victor Frankenstein,” “Mother Bears, Our Golden Shovel,” and “Eustachian Tube Dysfunction.”	
Settings: The mind.	**Participants:** The self.

Appendix B - Interview Formats

Interview Protocol: The role of a poet researcher can shift over time (Fischer, 2007), so understandably, the dialogic relationships I had with participants took different forms depending on our experiences together. Bhattacharya (2013) noted how a poetic dialogue with participants can evolve from a semi-structured style toward a "conversation and mutual sharing of information" (p. 612). As such, the interviews of this dissertation fell along a continuum of qualitative styles (Merriam, 2009), which included 1) semi-structured interviews, 2) focus groups, 3) interactive interviews, and 4) co-constructed narratives. I conducted over 50 interviews for this study, over a 3 year period. These interactions ranged between brief exchanges to multiple interviews. In order to show ways that narratives diverged and complicated one another, I decided to conduct a breadth of interviews, rather than a depth of interviews. Since the elusive, murky quality of poetic methods can often invite ambiguity (Sullivan, 2009), I created this chart to briefly explain how each style of interview was structured. I also decided to introduce a few participants, to provide the reader examples of how I tailored the discussion toward each individual's needs.

Semi-structured interviews: I typically used semi-structured interviews during more formal occasions. I also used semi-structured interviews with participants who I was less familiar with. As Merriam (2009) described, my semi-structured interviews used "flexibly worded" questions, so that I could "respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (p. 90). For example, I opted to follow a semi-structured interview format in my interview with poet Kaveh Akbar, who was one of the head organizers of the Divedapper Poetry Carnival. I decided to use a more conventional structure because I mostly know him in a professional context and we had not necessarily built the rapport required to have a more informal conversation. Semi-structured interviews occurred no more than 3 times with each participant, and lasted between 20 – 40 minutes.

Focus Groups: Sometimes as a teaching artist I collaborated with groups, of either educators or students, where I had yet to formalize individualized relationships. In situations like this, where time did not permit me to conduct one-on-one interviews, focus groups were an ideal way to gain insight from participants. As defined by Merriam (2009), a focus group is an "interview on a topic with a group of people who have knowledge on the topic" (p. 93). I used focus groups when I wanted to gain some particular insight about a specific issue. For example, I conducted two focus interviews with three students at an academy for gifted and talented students that I visit each year, because I wanted to hear about how their experiences with poetry at the academy differed from the curricula at their school. Focus groups included 2 - 4 participants and lasted between 10 – 20 minutes.

Interactive Interviews: In situations where I had familiarity and comfort with participants, I used an "interactive interview" structure (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). These participants were colleagues, collaborators, or students that I have known for a long time. In terms of structure, "interactive interviews usually consist of multiple interview sessions, and unlike traditional one-on-one interviews with strangers, are situated within the context of emerging and well-established relationships among participants and interviewers" (p. 279). Ellis, Kiesinger, and Tillmann-Healy (1997) claim that interactive interviews give participants the opportunity to dig into "emotionally charged and sensitive topics," which was evidenced in my interview with my dear friend and confidant, New Orleans hip hop artist Jonathan Brown, published on his podcast Groundwater. We turned on the tape-recorder and let the conversation drift in and out of topic. Interactive interviews occurred no more than 2 times and lasted between 30 – 90 minutes.

Co-constructed Narratives: The lives of poets often revolve around the exchanging of texts, which is why co-constructed narratives were used as an alternative method for interviews (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). A co-constructed narrative is "often told about or around an epiphany," and the process follows that "each person first writes her or his experience, and then shares and reacts to the story the other wrote at the same time" (p. 279). This process can be done by exchanging poems and letters, as showcased in my poetic dialog with a poet and DJ named Noncompliant. Co-constructed narratives also took place in a digital space in some instances, with dialogue happening via email, text, instant messaging, or on social media. Participants selected to co-construct narratives for this dissertation were often partners in ongoing participant relationships, meaning that our exchanges lasted a matter of hours, weeks, or even months.

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Education

Ph.D. in Literacy, Culture, and Language Education:	Indiana University, Bloomington, IN (2020)
M.A., Teaching (Emphasis in English and Speech):	University of Indianapolis, Indianapolis, IN (2012)
B.A., Communication Studies and English Writing:	Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY (2006)

Professional Experience

Research Associate, (May 2018 – Present), Center on Education and Lifelong Learning (CELL), in Indiana Institute on Disability and Community (IIDC) at Indiana University, Bloomington, IN

- Designed professional development curricula for Indiana Center on Teacher Quality (ICTQ) for educators and administrators in seven different school districts in Indiana.
- Facilitated professional development training and coaching for two Indiana school districts.
- Directed the *Power of a Sentence* literacy program in Indiana Women's Prison and the *Writing Our Resilience* trauma-informed writing program at Pendleton Correctional Facility.

Professional Performance Poet and Teaching Artist, (July 2005 – Present)

- Facilitated educational workshops in grade schools, colleges, prisons, libraries, and community centers across the US and UK, including semester-length series at the Indiana Women's Prison (2014 – 2016) in Indianapolis, IN, Bloomington Graduation School (2017) in Bloomington, IN, and at the Kings Center (2018 – Present) in Frankfort, KY.
- Served as guest lecturer and performer in Ireland, England, Canada and Puerto Rico.
- Was named the Official Poet of the Indianapolis 500 (2016), named Poet Laureate of Appleton Academy in Bradford, UK (2014-2016) Culver Academy in Culver, IN (2011), and Warren Regional Juvenile Center in Bowling Green, KY (2006 – 2008).
- Awarded honorary rank of Kentucky Colonel for youth advocacy work in Kentucky (2009).
- Served at Vice President and Board Member of Southern Fried Poetry, Inc. (2016 – Present).
- Served as the Master of Ceremonies at the Missouri Scholar's Academy (2014 – Present).
- Competed in national and regional poetry slams, with two semifinal stage appearances at National Poetry Slam (2005, 2008), six final stage appearances at Southern Fried Poetry Slam (2006, 2007, 2015), one final stage appearance at Rust Belt Poetry Slam (2013), and one final stage appearance at Lake Eden Arts Festival Regional Poetry Slam (2006).
- Organized and emceed reoccurring poetry slams and open mics at Indiana Reparatory Theatre, Earth House, Sanctuary on Penn, 300 East, and Local's Only in Indianapolis.
- Served as "guest judge" for youth slams such as the first Indiana Youth Poet Laureate competition (2019), Indianapolis Poetry Slam (2019), Indiana Humanities' Quantum Leap Poetry Contest at Wabash College (2018), Indy Pulse at Southport High School (2014) and at Brave New Voices International Youth Poetry Festival at The University of Chicago (2013).

Professional Experience (cont.)

Bureau Speaker, (January 2018 – Present), Indiana Humanities

- Facilitated literature/literacy programming at over twenty schools, universities, and libraries.
- Directed *Frankenstein Community Reads* project at Indiana Women's Prison (July 2018).
- Served as consultant for scholars, educators, librarians, and artists in state of Indiana.

Summer Academy Director and Head Lecturer, Slam Camp (November 2011 – 2018), Indiana University (2016), and Gustavus Adolphus College (2012 – 2015)

- Played multiple roles as coordinator, grant writer and head lecturer at week long intensive.
- Facilitated lectures and workshops at poetry slam-oriented summer academy for teens.
- Was given a summer Associate Instructor position at IU (2016) to fulfill director duties.

Graduate Assistant, Center on Education and Lifelong Learning (CELL) in the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community (IIDS), Indiana University, Bloomington, IN (2017 – 2018).

- Coordinated data management for research on restorative practices and PBIS projects.
- Served as consultant and training session facilitator for teachers across the state of Indiana.
- Facilitated the writing of grants and funding opportunities related to disability and education.

Student Researcher, Literacy, Culture, and Language Education Department (2016 – 2017), Indiana University, Bloomington, IN

- Researched critical performance theory and co-wrote grant to fund project in Puerto Rico.
- Conducted ethnographic fieldwork to explore theatre, spoken word, and graffiti in San Juan.

Associate Instructor, Student Academic Center (August 2016 – May 2017)
Indiana University, Bloomington, IN

- Instructed four sections of X150 (Becoming the Best Student) class per semester.
- Facilitated lessons related to study skills and served as support to students in need.

Associate Instructor, English Department (August 2014 – May 2017)
Indiana University, Bloomington, IN

- Instructed the Multilingual section of W131 Composition course for international students.
- Held tutorial services for ESL students hoping to improve academic writing in English.

Associate Instructor, Communication Department (August 2012 – August 2014)
University of Indianapolis, Indianapolis, IN

- Instructed Intro to Public Speaking, Oral Interpretation and Forensics Practicum courses.
- Assisted department in the creation of Lincoln Douglas and Parliamentary debate team.

Curriculum Director and Teaching Artist, (November 2012 – August 2014)
V.O.I.C.E.S., Inc, Indianapolis, IN

- Prepared and facilitated biweekly writing and literacy courses for two alternative schools.
- Helped coordinate special events and educational programming for youth in Indianapolis.
- Emceed youth poetry slams and other events at Renaissance School in Indianapolis.
- Developed curricula for VOICES unit contracts and served as wordsmith and consultant.

Professional Experience (cont.)

Assistant Director of Forensics (speech and debate), (August 2010 – November 2012)
University of Indianapolis, Indianapolis, IN

- Prepared several Indiana and Kentucky state champions and national finalists 2010 – 2012.
- Coached division II novice national champions and division III NFL fifth place in nation.
- Became national champion (2011) at Pi Kappa Delta Nationals in Alumni Performance.

Program Coordinator and In-House Wordsmith, (February 2007 – August 2010)
The Greenhouse Communication Initiative, Inc, Bowling Green, KY

- Facilitated poetry writing workshops in schools and youth programs in over 10 states.
- Presented at educational conferences and leadership summits all over the country.
- Facilitated weekly writing workshops for Kaleidoscope, Alive Center For Community Partnerships, Warren Regional Juvenile Center, and Warren County Court House in Bowling Green, KY, and for the greater Indianapolis Public School System in Indianapolis, IN.
- Hosted poetry slams, open mics, and performance showcases regularly at Western Kentucky University, Tidball's Live Music, The Capitol Arts Theatre, 440 Main, Bread and Bagel, and Lil Redz in Kentucky, at Café Coco in Tennessee, and Mo'Joe Coffeehouse in Indiana.
- Served as instructor and co-coordinator of Lilly and Gates Foundation funded Youth Poetry Project and Championship Communication League in Indianapolis Public Schools (2008).

Substitute Teaching and Student Teaching

- Taught in Warren Regional Juvenile Detention Center in KY, Queens Satellite High School in NY, and Eastwood Middle School and Christel House Middle School in IN.
- Facilitated subjects such as English, Social Studies, Public Speaking, and Civics.
- Served on Citizen's Advisory Council for Warren Regional Juvenile Detention Center (2007).

Academic Camp Counselor and Instructor

- Served as workshop head for summer speech and debate institutes at George Mason University, University of Texas, and Western Kentucky University academic camps.
- Helped students select scripts for competition and provided one-one-one coaching.

Publications and Presentations

Commissioned Works

Henze, A. & Shiva, D. J. (2017). *The year I had to show them what we're made of.* Commissioned by Saddleback College, Mission Viejo, CA.

Henze, A. (2015). *The Healing Project: Chapter seven (So much depends).* Commissioned by Sidney and Lois Eskenazi for Eskenazi Health and Hospital, Indianapolis, IN.

Peer Review Publications

Henze, A. & Hall, D.T. (2018). Dying of Thirst: Kendrick Lamar and the call for a "new school" hip hop pedagogy. In A. Kraehe, R. Gaztambide-Fernandez & B.S. Carpenter II (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook on Race and the Arts in Education* (pp. 265 – 283). London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Peer Review Publications (cont.)

Henze, A. (2017). Winding Road to West Yorkshire. In P. Sameshima, A. Fidyk, K. James, & C. Leggo (Eds.), *Poetic Inquiry: Enchantment of Place* (pp. 193 – 196). Wilmington: Vernon Press.

Henze, A. (2017). Written with love from a passing train. In L. Carspecken (Ed.), *Love in the time of ethnography* (pp. 189 – 192). Maryland: Lexington Books.

Henze, A. (2017). Read this book out loud: A review of Young Adult works by artists from the poetry slam community. *The ALAN Review, 42*(2), 68-78.

Hines, M. B., Henze, A., Ivanova, C., Rowland, L., Waggoner, L., & Lisak, M. (2016) Action research in education. *Oxford Bibliographies*. New York: Oxford University Press. Retrieved from http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756810/obo-9780199756810-0140.xml?rskey=Lyz490&result=1&q=action+research#firstMatch

Bumbalough, M., & Henze, A. (2015). Infinite ammo: Exploring issues of post-traumatic stress disorder in in popular video games. In S. Y. Tettegah & W. D. Huang (Eds.), *Emotions, technology, and digital games* (15 – 34). San Diego: Academic Press.

Publications in Literary Journals and Popular Media

Henze, A. (2019, April 7). A graduate student uses National Poetry Month to consider… In R.R. Dorsey (Ed.), *The Poet's Weave.* Retrieved from https://indianapublicmedia.org/poetsweave/graduate-student-national-poetry-month/

Henze, A. (2019, March 17). Mother Bears, our golden shovel; A grad school friend chastises me about self care, and sounds like Henry Clerval scolding Victor Frankenstein. In R.R. Dorsey (Ed.), *The Poet's Weave.* Retrieved from https://indianapublicmedia.org/poetsweave/henze-2.php

Henze, A. (2018, August 15). Poetry from prison. *Indiana Humanities.* Retrieved from https://indianahumanities.org/poetry-from-prison

Henze, A. (2017, December 17). Haibun: April 19, Tuesday. *Leaves of Ink*. Retrieved from http://www.leaves-of-ink.com/2017/12/haibun-april-19-tuesday.html

Henze, A. (2017, August 16). Outside a classroom… *Cuento Magazine, 666.* Retrieved from https://twitter.com/CuentoMag/status/897931020653084673

Henze, A. (2017, August 14) Falling to earth… *Cuento Magazine, 665.* Retrieved from https://twitter.com/CuentoMag/status/896978769482727424

Henze, A. (2017, July). April 3, Sunday. *Contemporary Haibun Online, 13*(2). Retrieved from http://contemporaryhaibunonline.com/pages132/Henze_April.html

Publications in Literary Journals and Popular Media (cont.)

Henze, A. (2016, January 9). Making a Murderer and the power of words. *Indianapolis Star*. Retrieved from https://www.indystar.com/story/opinion/2016/01/07/making-murderer-power-words/78407200/

Henze, A. (2013). *Written in the dish pit.* Indianapolis: Chatter House Press.

Henze, A. (2009, Spring). Haiku. In T. Yamaguchi (Ed.), *Minglewood, 1*(2), pp. 6.

Henze, A. (July, 2007). South Kentucky pours poetry from its palms. *Soky Happenings,* pp. 31.

Grants and Fellowships

Henze, A. (2018). *"Writing Our Resilience": Using poetry to explore the relationships between Adverse Childhood Experiences and incarceration*. Awarded $18,000 by Indiana University Foundation for New Frontiers in the Arts & Humanities Fellowship for research project at Indiana Women's Prison, Indianapolis, IN.

Henze, A. (2018). *Frankenstein: One state/one story.* Awarded $1000 by Indiana Humanities for Community Reads project at the Indiana Women's Prison, Indianapolis, IN.

Henze, A. (2017). *Building greater stories*. Awarded $3120 by Bloomington Urban Enterprise Association for Zone Arts Grant at Bloomington Graduation School in Bloomington, IN.

Medina, C. & Henze, A. (2016). *Youth critical literacies and pedagogies in public spaces: Analyzing the pedagogies, critical discourses, texts and social actions in Youth Public Performances in Puerto Rico*. Awarded $10,000 by Proffitt Summer Faculty Fellowship for project work in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Henze, A. (2016). *Slam Camp youth poetry festival*. Awarded $1200 by Bloomington Arts Commissioned for Arts Project Grant in Bloomington, IN.

Henze, A. (2014 – 2016). Awarded the Harste Alternative Literacies Fellowship by Jerome C. Harste for work at Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

Professional Development and Consulting

Henze, A. (2018 – 2019). *How to host a poetry slam for elementary school children.* Consultation for Poetical at Charles W. Fairbanks Elementary, Indianapolis, IN.

Henze, A. (2018 – 2019). *Implementing creative poetry programming in immigration detention facilities.* Consultation for the College of Education at Clemson University, Clemson, SC.

Henze, A. (2018 – 2019). *Survey of humanities programming in Indiana prisons.* Consultant for Indiana Humanities across state of Indiana.

Henze, A. (2018, August). *Bout managing for PrideSlam.* Consultation for Bloomington Pride at Rhino's Youth Center, Bloomington, IN.

Professional Development and Consulting (cont.)

Henze, A. (2018, August). *Coaching to prepare for the National Poetry Slam.* Consultation for the Bloomington Poetry Slam, Bloomington, IN.

Henze, A. (2017, March). *How to host a youth poetry slam*. Consultation for PRISM Youth Community (Bloomington Pride) at Hopscotch Coffee, Bloomington, IN.

Henze, A. (2016, January – March). *Theatrics of spoken word poetry.* Consultation for Bridge and Tunnel at The Indiana Reparatory Theatre, Indianapolis, IN.

Henze, A. (2015, July). *Reflecting on why we love teaching.* Workshop facilitated at Woodkirk Academy, Leeds, UK.

Henze, A. & Rowland, L. (2015, July). *Immersive literacies: A swimming lesson*. Keynote address for TeachMeet Bradford at Appleton Academy, Bradford, UK.

Henze, A. (2014, March - June). *Light the stage: Spark a revolution.* Consultation for National Speech and Debate Association, Kansas City, KS.

Henze, A. (2014, May). *When readers embrace their inner nerd.* Keynote address for TeachMeet Bradford at Appleton Academy, Bradford, UK.

Henze, A., Hernandez, C., & Williams, E.J. (2009, October 27). *Performance and dramatic interpretation*. Facilitated for the forensics team at University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI.

Bernaugh, S., Henze, A., & Wright, C., & Day, D. (2008, April 11). *Cultural competency and communication.* Performance and workshop resented at Elston Middle School, Michigan City, IN.

Conference Presentations

Henze, A. (2019, March). *"Cloudy Day": Using prison literature in English classrooms for youth and adult learners.* Presented at the Indiana Council for Teachers of English, Indianapolis, IN.

Hines, M.B., & Henze, A. (2018, November). *Building Greater Stories': Using poetry and art to create student-voiced literacy communities.* Presented at the Literacy Research Association Conference, Indian Wells, CA.

Henze, A., et al. (2018, November). *Poetry, Spoken Word, and Hip Hop Literacies in Research and Education*. Presented at the Literacy Research Association Conference, Tampa, FL.

Kersulov, M., & Henze, A. (2018, November). *Student reading representation in superheroes and writing their own "super" identities*. Presented at National Council of Teachers of English Annual Convention, Houston, TX.

Conference Presentations (cont.)

Henze, A., Jackson, S., Sandberg, S., & Winkelman, M. (2018, October). *The Arts and Incarceration.* Presented at Indiana Arts Homecoming, Fort Wayne, IN.

Henze, A. (2018, September). *Remixing Frankenstein: Using hip hop literacies to "dissect" Romantic literature.* Presented at International Conference on Literacy, Culture, and Language Education, Bloomington, IN.

Henze, A., et al. (2017, November). *Poetry, Spoken Word, and Hip Hop Literacies in Research and Education*. Presented at the Literacy Research Association Conference, Tampa, FL.

Kersulov, M., Henze, A., Panos, A., Yi, J. (2017, November). *Critical Approaches to Social Media and Literacy Practices of Popular Culture*. Presented at the Literacy Research Association Conference, Tampa, FL.

Hines, M.B., Henze, A., Kersulov, M. *"You're not a good fit": Reinterpreting resistance at Last Chance High School through contrastive perspectives*. Presented at the Literacy Research Association Conference, Tampa, FL.

Henze, A. (2017, November). *Autothethnography: "A Graduate Student uses National Poetry Writing Month to Consider Seasonal Depression, Stress-Eating, Loneliness, and His Alcohol Intake."* Presented at the International Symposium on Poetic Inquiry, Bowling Green, OH.

Henze, A. (2017, May). *Discourse Analysis: Autism, Stigma, and Spoken Word Poetry*. Presented at the Discourse Analysis in Education Conference, Bloomington, IN.

Henze, A. (2017, May). *Autoethnography: "Winding Road to West Yorkshire."* Presented at the International Congress on Qualitative Inquiry, Urbana-Champaign, IL.

Henze, A., Torres, A., Jocson, K., & Medina, C.L. (2016, November). *Praxis and performed verse: Using autoethnographic poetry to envision transformed literacy spaces.* Presented at the Literacy Research Association Conference, Nashville, TN.

Medina, C.L. & Henze, A. (2016, November). *Youth Critical Literacies and Pedagogies of Public Spaces: Analyzing the Critical Discourses, Texts, and Social Action in Youth Public Performances in Puerto Rico*. Presented at the Literacy Research Association annual conference, Nashville, TN.

Hall, L., Mayren, M., Jones, T.L., & Henze, A. (2016, October). *Indy Pulse.* Presented at the Public Policy & International Affairs "Moving the World Forward" Conference, Bloomington, IN.

Henze, A. (2016, July). *Visual verses: Poetry comics as multimodal classroom texts.* Presented at the Comics Art Conference during Comic Con International, San Diego, CA.

Conference Presentations (cont.)

Henze, A., Medina, C., & Campano, G. (2015, December). *Speak your truth! Examining poetry slam as creative advocacy and critical engagement*. Presented at Literacy Research Association annual conference, Carlsbad, CA.

DeMulder, S. & Henze, A. (2015, October). *Precision revision: How to make a good poem great.* Presented at the Get Lit: Words Ignite Poetic Convergence, Los Angeles, CA.

Rowland, L. & Henze, A. (2015, July). *Chronic illness, poetry, and the body*. Presented at International Conference of Educational, Cultural, and Disability Studies, Liverpool, UK.

Rowland, L. & Henze, A. (2015, April). *The Language Inside: Teens, chronic illness, and poetry.* Presented at the Second City Disabilities in Education Conference (AERA SIG), Chicago, IL.

Henze, A., & Yamazawa, G. (2014, November). *Addressing trauma and social crises in the classroom through spoken word pedagogy.* Presented in 'High School Matters' sessions at National Council of Teachers of English Annual Convention, Washington, D.C.

DeMulder, S. & Henze, A. (2014, October). *Advanced revision.* Presented at the Get Lit: Words Ignite Poetic Convergence, Los Angeles, CA.

Kersulov, M., Henze, A., Bumbalough, M. (2014, August). *Roleplaying games in the classroom: Building literacy with action*. Presented at Gen Con, Indianapolis, IN.

Henze, A. & Ahanu, D. (2014, June). *Poetry slam 101 for educators*. Presented at the Southern Fried Poetry Festival, Greenville, SC.

Mack, J.W., Mabrey, E., Henze, A., Yamazawa, G., Rae, K. (2014, June). *The state of slam in 2014.* Presented at the Southern Fried Poetry Festival, Greenville, SC.

Henze, A., & Medina, C. (2014, June). *Merging the personal and political in poetry slam instruction: An autoethnographic testimony*. Presented at Scenario Forum for Performative Teaching, Learning and Research, Cork, IE.

Henze, A. (2014, March). *Taking the stage: The politics of space in spoken word pedagogy.* Presented at the New Terrain: Annual Indiana University Landscape, Space, and Place Graduate Student Conference, Bloomington, IN.

Kersulov, M., Henze, A., Shin, K., Bumbalough, M. (2014, March). *Teaching comics: Current approaches to graphic literature in the classroom.* Presented at Indiana Comic Con, Indianapolis, IN.

Henze, A., & Bumbalough, M. (2014, March). *Exploring themes of post-traumatic stress disorder in video games.* Presented at Indiana Comic Con, Indianapolis, IN.

Conference Presentations (cont.)

V.O.I.C.E.S. Corp (2013, February). *Legislation… The making of laws.* Presented for the Children… Our Best Investment Statehouse Day at the Indiana Government Center, Indianapolis, IN.

Henze, A., & Cunningham, A. (2011, November). *Developing characters through improvisational activities.* Presented at the National Communication Association annual conference, New Orleans, LA.

Bernaugh, S. D., Henze, A., Hernandez, C., & Williams, E. J. (2010, May). *The Greenhouse Communication Initiative: Community outreach in the juvenile detention center.* Presented at the Forum for Juvenile Justice Educators and Trainers, Lexington, KY.

Bernaugh, S. D., Wright, C. J., Henze, A. D., Hernandez, C., Williams, E. J. (2009, November). *Introducing The Greenhouse Communication Initiative*. Presented at the Founder's Table at the National Association of Multicultural Education Conference, Denver, CO.

Bernaugh, S. D., Wright, C. J., Henze, A. D., Hernandez, C., Williams, E. J. (2009, November). *Hip-hop pedagogy in the classroom*. Presented at the National Association of Multicultural Education Conference, Denver, CO.

Bernaugh, S. D., Henze, A. D., Wright, C. J., & Malhortra, K. (2009, October). *Community outreach in the juvenile detention center.* Presented at the 15th National Symposium on Juvenile Services, Indianapolis, IN.

Bernaugh, S. D., Henze, A., & Wright, C.J. (2008, March). *Many voices, one vision..* Presented at the Indianapolis Public Schools Youth Summit, Indianapolis, IN.

Smiley, A. D., Day, D., Cosby, B., Henze, A., & Bernaugh, S. D. (2008, November). *Using hip-hop and poetry slam in the classroom.* Presented at the National Association of Multicultural Education Conference, New Orleans, LA.

Smiley, A. D., Day, D., Cosby, B., Henze, A., & Bernaugh, S. D. (2008, March). *How to use hip-hop in your classroom.* Presented at the Indiana State Reading Association Conference, Indianapolis, IN.

Cosby, B., Smiley, A. D., Henze, A., Bernaugh, S. D., Day, D. (2007, October 18). *Politics, hip-hop, and your poetry unit.* Presented at the Indianapolis Public School Multicultural Center 20th IPS Annual Infusion Conference, Indianapolis, IN.

Press & Media

Cox, E. (2019, September 1). Cluster of downtown festivals goes smoothly. *The Herald Times.* Retrieved from https://www.hoosiertimes.com/herald_times_online/news/local/cluster-of-downtown-festivals-goes-smoothly/article_19acc557-1ad7-5ea1-8cef-110cd29d4f51.html

Press & Media (cont.)

Crown, C. (2019, August 2). Indiana's recidivism rates lowest in 6 years; women in prison stay on right track with special programs. *Fox 59.* Retrieved from https://fox59.com/2019/08/02/indianas-recidivism-rates-lowest-in-6-years-women-in-prison-stay-on-right-track-with-special-programs/?fbclid=IwAR2JYJpyASdyOlhN5KGaItBR57C4TQB8Spadd_jEIFTNfBUF3qtehrUVwuo

'One Giant Leap' free space movies start June 6. (2019, May 29). *Batesville Herald Tribune*. Retrieved from https://www.batesvilleheraldtribune.com/news/local_news/one-giant-leap-free-space-movies-start-june/article_c2c112c4-eda2-5eb1-b657-324388ea621c.html

Tilley, J. P. (2018, October 12). Leaders in the arts community will share, learn at statewide conference. *The Herald Times*. Retrieved from https://www.hoosiertimes.com/herald_times_online/entertainment/leaders-in-the-arts-community-will-share-learn-at-statewide/article_97d12932-6abc-5338-bb25-e4b413497adf.html

Heath, B. (2018, September 24). Our favorite things at ORANJE. *Indianapolis Monthly*. Retrieved from https://www.indianapolismonthly.com/arts-culture/our-favorite-things-at-oranje/

Oranje, Indy's edgiest arts party, gives last hurrah. (2018, September 22). *The Indianapolis Star.* Retrieved from https://www.indystar.com/picture-gallery/entertainment/2018/09/23/oranje-indys-edgiest-arts-party-coca-cola-plant-mass-ave/1403271002/

Sullivan among more than 20 communities awarded 'Frakenstein'-related activities. (2018, August 10). *Tribune Star.* Retrieved from http://www.tribstar.com/news/local_news/sullivan-among-more-than-communities-awarded-frankenstein-related-activities/article_35eb6196-9cbf-11e8-acec-ff1c6bdbfaff.html

200th anniversary of classic novel inspires Zionsville library's Frankenslam poetry event. (2018, April 2). *Current*. Retrieved from http://youarecurrent.com/2018/04/02/200th-anniversary-of-classic-novel-inspires-zionsville-librarys-frankenslam-poetry-event/

IndyStar Storytellers. (2018, January 26). What it's like to date 32 guys in a month, and more stories of love. *The Indianapolis Star.* Retrieved from https://www.indystar.com/story/news/2018/01/26/what-its-like-date-32-guys-month-and-more-stories-love/1045247001/

Gudas, C. (2017, September 2). Aural arts to be performed at Fourth Street Festival. *Indiana Daily Student.* Retrieved from https://www.idsnews.com/article/2017/09/aural-arts-to-be-performed-at-fourth-street-festival

Press & Media (cont.)

Tolley, J. (2017, August 12). The Indiana camp where getting slammed is a good thing: BTN LiveBIG. *The Big Ten Network*. Retrieved from http://btn.com/2017/08/12/the-indiana-camp-where-getting-slammed-is-a-good-thing-btn-livebig/

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Writing, Performance, and Communication Workshops

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Henze, A. (2019, June 24 – 25). *Revision workshop, performance night, and youth slam.* Presented for Missouri Scholar's Academy at University of Missouri, Columbia, MO.

Brewer, T., & Henze, A. (2019, March 30) *Poetry on demand*. Presented for the Lotus Blossoms World Bazaar at Fairview Elementary School, Bloomington, IN.

Henze, A., Brewer, T., Wirtshafter, J. (2019, January 25). *Writing workshop and poetry slam.* Presented at IU Late Nite at Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

Henze, A. (2018, October 29). *FrankenSlam: Where the poetry is alive! It's alive!* Presented at St. Richard's Episcopal School, Indianapolis, IN.

Henze, A. (2018, October 25). *FrankenSlam: Where the poetry is alive! It's alive!* Presented at Tyson Public Library, Versailles, IN.

Writing, Performance, and Communication Workshops (cont.)

Henze, A. (2018, October 24). *FrankenSlam: Where the poetry is alive! It's alive!* Presented at Logansport Middle School, Logansport, IN.

Henze, A. (2018, October 23). *FrankenSlam: Where the poetry is alive! It's alive!* Presented at Sullivan County Public Library, Sullivan, IN.

Henze, A. (2018, October 13). *FrankenSlam: Where the poetry is alive! It's alive!* Presented at Saline District Library, Saline, MI.

Henze, A. (2018, October 12). *FrankenSlam: Where the poetry is alive! It's alive!* Presented at Northridge Middle School, Crawfordsville, IN.

Henze, A. (2018, October 6). *FrankenSlam: Where the poetry is alive! It's alive!* Presented at Monroe County Public Library, Bloomington, IN.

Henze, A. (2018, September 29). *FrankenSlam: Where the poetry is alive! It's alive!* Presented at the Indianapolis Public Library College Avenue Branch, Indianapolis, IN.

Henze, A. (2018, September 20). *FrankenSlam: Where the poetry is alive! It's alive!* Presented at Concord High School, Elkhart, IN.

Henze, A. (2018, September 13). *FrankenSlam: Where the poetry is alive! It's alive!* Presented at Irvington Preparatory Academy, Indianapolis, IN.

Henze, A. (2018, July 26). *FrankenSlam: Where the poetry is alive! It's alive!* Presented at Flora-Monroe Township Public Library, Flora, IN.

Henze, A., & Zipfel, J. (2018, July 24 – Aug 3). *Frankenstein: Community Reads at the Indiana Women's Prison*. Four-meeting course presented at Indiana Women's Prison, Indianapolis, IN.

Henze, A. (2018, April 17). *FrankenSlam: Where the poetry is alive! It's alive!* Presented at Hussey-Mayfield Memorial Public Library, Zionsville, IN.

Brewer, T., & Henze, A. (2018, April 6 - 7) *Poetry on demand*. Presented for the Lotus Blossoms World Bazaar at Fairview Elementary School, Bloomington, IN.

Henze, A. (2018, February 27). *Unlocking inner creativity with poetry.* Presented at Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

Henze, A. (2018, February 22). *FrankenSlam: Where the poetry is alive! It's alive!* Presented at Trine University, Angola, IN.

Henze, A., Jones, T.L. (2017, April 4). *Get free with poetry.* Presented at North High School, Evansville, IN.

Writing, Performance, and Communication Workshops (cont.)

Brewer, T., & Henze, A. (2017, March 31 – April 1) *Poetry on demand*. Presented for the Lotus Blossoms World Bazaar at Binford Elementary School, Bloomington, IN.

Palomo, W., & Henze, A. (2017, January 20). *Healing the self, healing the world: A poetry workshop.* Presented at Inaugurate the Revolution, Bloomington, IN.

Henze, A. (2016, June 28 – 29). *Three workshops and two slams.* Presented for the Missouri Scholar's Academy at the University of Missouri, Columba, MO.

Henze, A. (2015, July 10). *Poetry and the festival of light*. Presented at Bellview Girl's School, Bradford, UK.

Henze, A. (2015, July 9). *Poetry writing and identity*. Presented at Dixon Trinity Academy, Bradford, UK.

Henze, A. (2015, July 8). *Poetry writing and identity.* Presented at Woodkirk Academy, Leeds, UK.

Henze, A. (2015, July 7). *Poetry writing and identity*. Presented at Bradford Studio School, Bradford, UK.

Henze, A. (2015, May 14). *Writing workshop and poetry feature.* Presented for Queen's City Poetry Slam at Rohs Street Café, Cincinatti, OH.

Henze, A. (2015, June 13). *Crash course in slam poetry*. Presented for the Missouri Scholar's Academy at the University of Missouri, Columbia, MO.

Henze, A., Hernandez, C., & Williams, E. J. (2009, November 19). *Hip-hop, poetry and pedagogy.* Presented for the Education Program at Vincennes University, Vincennes, IN.

Henze, A., Hernandez, C., & Williams, E. J. (2009, November 19). *An introduction to spoken word poetry.* Presented at Lynnehurst 7th & 8th Grade Center, Indianapolis, IN.

Henze, A., Hernandez, C., & Williams, E. J. (2009, November 10). *An introduction to poetry writing and performance.* Presented at the Arkansas Juvenile Assessment and Treatment Center, Bryant, AR.

Henze, A., Hernandez, C., & Williams, E. J. (2009, November 4). *Poetry workshop and performance.* Presented at Cesar Chavez Community School, Albuquerque, NM.

Henze, A. Hernandez, C., & Williams, E. J. (2009, November 3). *A visit from the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented at The University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, Colorado Springs, CO.

Henze, A., Hernandez, C., & Williams, E. J. (2009, October 26). *A day of poetry writing workshops.* Presented at Marshall Middle School, Marshall, WI.

Writing, Performance, and Communication Workshops (cont.)

Henze, A., Hernandez, C., & Williams, E. J. (2009, October 22). *Poetry writing workshop*. Presented at the Cook County Juvenile Detention Center, Chicago, IL.

Henze, A., Hernandez, C., Williams, E. J. (2009, October 20). *Workshop and showcase, featuring The Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented at Young Chicago Authors, Chicago, IL.

Henze, A., Hernandez, C., & Williams, E. J. (2009, Octboer 4th – 5th). *Two days of spoken word poetry.* Presented at Bon Lin Middle School, Bartlett, TN.

Henze, A. (2009, September 15). *Poetry writing and identity*. Presented at Warren Easton High School, New Orleans, LA.

Henze, A. & Alcindor, K. (2009, September 14). *Poetry writing and identity*. Presented at Iberville Middle School, Baton Rouge, LA.

Henze, A., Bernaugh, S., & Wright, C. (2008, July). *Poetry writing and performance.* Facilitated for the Warren County Schools ESL Summer Camp at Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY.

Henze, A., Bernaugh, S., & Wright, C. (2008, June). *Poetry writing and interpersonal communication.* Facilitated for the Women's Studies 'Women & Kids Learning Together Camp' at Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY.

Bernaugh, S., Henze, A., Wright, C., & Day, D. (2008, April 11). *Poetry writing and performance.* Facilitated at Elston Middle School, Michigan City, IN.

Bernaugh, S., Henze, A., & Wright, C. (2008, April) *Poetry writing and performance.* Facilitated at New Tech High School, Indianapolis, IN.

Bernaugh, S., Henze, A., & Wright, C. (2008, March) *Poetry writing and performance.* Facilitated at Arlington High School, Indianapolis, IN.

Bernaugh, S., Henze, A., & Wright, C. (2008, February) *Poetry writing and performance.* Facilitated at Manual High School, Indianapolis, IN.

Bernaugh, S., Henze, A., & Wright, C. (2008, February) *Poetry writing and performance.* Facilitated at Broadripple High School, Indianapolis, IN.

Henze, A. & Wright, C. (2008, February) *Poetry writing and performance.* Facilitated for Warren East High School, Bowling Green, KY.

Henze, A. & Bernaugh, S. (2007, July). *Poetry writing and performance*. Facilitated for the Warren County Schools ESL Summer Camp at Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY.

Writing, Performance, and Communication Workshops (cont.)

Henze, A., Bernaugh, S., & McDonald, B. (2007, June). *Poetry writing and interpersonal communication.* Facilitated for the Women's Studies 'Women & Kids Learning Together Camp' at Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY.

Henze, A., Bernaugh, S., & Wright, C. (2007, March). *Poetry writing and identity.* Facilitated at the Franklin Learning Center, Franklin, KY.

Henze, A. & McDonald, B. (2007, February). *Poetry writing and performance.* Facilitated at Moss Middle School, Bowling Green, KY.

Henze, A. & Bernaugh, S. (2006, October 27). *Poetry writing and performance.* Facilitated at Warren Central High School, Bowling Green, KY.

Henze, A. & Wright, C. (2006, September) *Poetry writing and performance.* Facilitated for Greenwood High School, Bowling Green, KY.

Poetry Readings. Lectures, and Theatrical Performances

Henze, A., et al. (2019, August 31 - September 1). *'Poetry on Demand.'* Presented for the Spoken Word Stage at the Fourth Street Festival of the Arts and Crafts, Bloomington, IN.

Brewer, T., Henze, A., and Carrell, B. (2019, June 22). *'Poetry on Demand.'* Presented at Arts Fair on the Square, Bloomington, IN.

Brewer, T., Henze, A., and Carrell, B. (2019, May 28). *'Poetry on Demand.'* Presented at Bloomington Street Fair, Bloomington, IN.

Henze, A. (2019, January 28). *Representations of the American prison in literature and media.* Presented in "The cultural lens: Identity, community, & the nation" course at Butler University, Indianapolis, IN.

Henze, A. (2018, November 20). *Poetry night*. Presented at the Bokeh Lounge, Evansville, IN.

Henze, A. (2018, November 7). *Poetry and hip hop in elementary education.* Presented at Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

Brewer, T., Henze, A., and Carrell, B. (2018, September 22). '*Poetry on Demand*.' Presented for Oranje festival, Indianapolis, IN.

Henze, A., et al. (2018, September 1 – 2). *'Poetry on Demand.'* Presented for the Spoken Word Stage at the Fourth Street Festival of the Arts and Crafts, Bloomington, IN.

Brewer, T., & Henze, A. (2018, April 29). '*Poetry on Demand*.' Presented for the Bloomington Bicentennial Celebration, Bloomington, IN.

Poetry Readings. Lectures, and Theatrical Performances (cont.)

Henze, A. & Brewer, T. (2017, September 15 – 16). *Adult and youth poetry*. Presented for the Arts Village at the Lotus World Music and Arts Festival, Bloomington, IN.

Henze, A., et al. (2017, September 5). *How to teach poetry in prison.* Presented for the Back to School Story Slam at Central Library, Indianapolis, IN.

Henze, A., et al. (2017, September 2 – 3). *'Poetry on Demand.'* Presented for the Spoken Word Stage at the Fourth Street Festival of the Arts and Crafts, Bloomington, IN.

Henze, A., Miller, C. & Kwong, L. (2017, July 13). *Featuring Henze, Miller and Kwong*. Presented for Writers Guild at Bloomington at Spoken Word Series, Bloomington, IN.

Henze, A. (2017, May 4). *Featuring Adam Henze*. Presented for Poetry on Brick Street at the SullivanMunce Cultural Center, Zionsville, IN.

Henze, A. (2017, April 28). *Emcee, Bloomington Grand Slam 2017*. Presented for the Bloomington Poetry Slam at the Bishop, Bloomington, IN.

Henze, A., et al (2016, September 3 – 4). *'Poetry on Demand.'* Presented for the Spoken Word Stage at the Fourth Street Festival of the Arts and Crafts, Bloomington, IN.

Henze, A. (2016, June 7). *Poetry*. Presented at Poet's Passage, San Juan, PR.

Henze, A. (2016, May 21). *For those who love fast loud things*. Presented at Qualifying Day of the 100th Running of the Indianapolis 500 at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, Indianapolis, IN.

Henze, A. (2016, February 22). *Featuring poet Adam Henze*. Presented for Writer's Week at Hazelwood West High School, Hazelwood, MO.

Henze, A. (2015, July 15). *Poetry performance.* Presented at Appleton Academy, Bradford, UK.

Henze, A. (2015, February 24). *Featuring poet Adam Henze*. Presented for Writer's Week at Hazelwood West High School, Hazelwood, MO.

Henze, A. (2014, July 29). *The Healing Project: So much depends*. Presented at the opening of The Commonground at Eskenazi Hospital, Indianapolis, IN.

Henze, A. (2014, June 17). *A night of poetry with Adam Henze*. Presented for the Missouri Scholar's Academy at University of Missouri, Columbia, MO.

Williams, S., Henze, A., York, J. (2013, September 14). *An evening of spoken word with Saul Williams.* Presented at Do317 Lounge, Indianapolis, IN.

Poetry reading by invitation. (2013, December 14). Presented at the wedding of Penny Dunning and Michael Rothman, Indianapolis, IN.

Poetry Readings. Lectures, and Theatrical Performances (cont.)

White, J. (2013, October 4 – 13) *Raft of the medusa* by Joe Pintauro. Seven showings presented at The Theatre Within, Indianapolis, IN.

Anti-poetik: Is it really that deep? (2013, July 28). Presented at the Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, IN.

The Encyclopedia Show Indianapolis. (2013, January 10). *Series 2, Volume 1: Dinosaurs*. Presented at the Irving Theater, Indianapolis, IN.

Black, T., Henze, A., & Barnes, J. (2012, February) *3 acts of TOO BLACK*. Presented at Ball State University, Muncie, IN.

The Encyclopedia Show. (2011, April 18). *Special episode: ParaNORMAL activity.* Presented at the National Forensics Association National Tournament awards ceremony, Normal, IL.

Henze, A. (2010, June 24) *La vida variety show*. Presented at Birdy's Live, Indianapolis, IN.

Henze, A. (2010, June 18). *Featuring Adam Henzbo*. Presented at the Word Gallery, Westfield, IN.

Henze, A. (2010, June 14). *Featuring Adam Henzbo*. Presented at The Venue, Louisville, IN.

Henze, A. & Hernandez, C. (2010, February 28). *Java Monkey Slam: Featuring Adam Henzbo and Cuban Hernandez.* Presented at Java Monkey, Decatur, GA.

Lizz Straight Ministries. (2010, February 27). *Celebration of poetry and music.* Presented at the Putnam Correctional Institution, East Palatka, FL.

Lizz Straight Ministries. (2010, February 27). *Black History Month poetry celebration.* Presented at the Hamilton Correctional Institution, Jasper, FL.

Lizz Straight Ministries. (2010, February 26). *Celebration of poetry and music.* Presented at Hernando Correctional Institution, Brooksville, FL.

Lizz Straight Ministries. (2010, February, 24). *Celebration of poetry and music.* Presented at Hardee Correctional Institution, Bowling Green, FL.

Blair, D., Wilson, E., & Henze, A. (2010, February 23). *Black on Black Rhyme Tampa, Featuring Blair and the Boyfriends with special guest Adam Henzbo*. Presented at Club Atlanta, Tampa, FL.

Henze, A. (2010, February 22). *PAM: Poetry-Art-Music, Featuring Adam Henze*. Presented at Studio 620, St. Petersburg, FL.

Lizz Straight Ministries. (2010, February 22). *Black History Month poetry celebration*. Presented at the Polk Correctional Institution, Polk City, FL.

Poetry Readings. Lectures, and Theatrical Performances (cont.)

Henze, A. (2010, February 20). *Sacred Sounds poetry slam*. Presented at Sacred Grounds Coffee House, Tampa, FL.

Lizz Straight Ministries. (2010, February 19). *African American art: "A look at the past and glimpse into the future."* Presented at the Demilly Correctional Institution, Polk City, FL.

Lizz Straight Ministries. (2010, February 17). *Black History Month poetry celebration*. Presented at the Polk CI Work Camp, Polk City, FL.

Henze, A. (2010, February 14). *Valentines at Island Vibez poetry and open mic, Featuring Adam Henzbo.* Presented at the Caribbean Hut, Tampa, FL.

Lizz Straight Ministries. (2010, February 12). *Celebration of poetry and music.* Presented at Sumpter Correctional Institution, Bushnell, FL.

Henze, A. (2010, February 10). *Comedy in the raw: Open mic*. Presented at Tampa Improv, Tampa, FL.

Henze, A. (2010, February 9). *Black on Black Rhyme Tampa Featuring Adam Henzbo*. Presented at Club Atlanta, Tampa, FL.

Henze, A. (2010, February 5). *Got Jokes Improv featuring Adam Henzbo*. Presented at Peabody's Billiards & Games, Tampa, FL.

Henze, A. (2010, February 4). *Neo Nerd featuring Adam Henzbo.* Presented at the Tampa Improv, Tampa, FL.

Henze, A. & Hernandez, C. (2009, November 20). *Featuring Henzbo & Cuban*. Presented for The Earth House Poetry Slam at The Earth House, Indianapolis, IN.

Henze, A, Hernandez, C., & Williams, E. J. (2009, November 13). *Featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented for Poetry Night at The Time Warp Tea Room, Knoxville, TN.

Henze, A., Hernandez, C., & Williams, E. J. (2009, November 12). *Phresh Fam*. Presented at Niteclass at Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY.

Hernandez, C., Henze, A., & Williams, E. J. (2009, November 7). *Featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented at Free Poetry, Hot Springs, AR.

Henze, A., Hernandez, C., & Williams, E. J. (2009, November 4). *Featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented for Poetry and Beer at the Blackbird Buvette, Albuquerque, NM.

Henze, A. & Hernandez, C. (2009, November 3). *Featuring Henzbo & Cuban*. Presented for the Freedom of Speech Poetry Night at Gypsy House Café, Denver, CO.

Poetry Readings. Lectures, and Theatrical Performances (cont.)

Henze, A., Hernandez, C., & Williams, E. J. (2009, November 2). *Featuring The Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented for Slam Nuba at The Crossroads Theater, Denver, CO.

Henze, A. & Hernandez, C. (2009, November 1). *Featuring Henzbo & Cuban*. Presented for The Sunday Nights Poetry Slam at The Mercury Café, Denver, CO.

Henze, A., Hernandez, C., & Williams, E. J. (2009, October 25). *Halloween party featuring The Sunshine Bluegrass Tour*. Presented at Rachael's Café, Bloomington, IN.

Henze, A. (2009, October 21). *Featuring Adam Henzbo*. Presented for Safe Smile at Trace, Chicago, IL.

Henze, A., Hernandez, C. (2009, October 19). *Mental Graffiti open mic and slam*. Presented at Mental Graffiti, Chicago, IL.

Henze, A. & Hernandez, C. (2009, October 17). *Featuring Henzbo & Cuban.* Presented at The Uptown Poetry Slam at The Green Mill, Chicago, IL.

Hernandez, C., Henze, A., & Williams, E. J. (2009, October 17). *Featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented at The Artist Village, Detroit, MI.

Hernandez, C., Henze, A., Williams, E. J. (2009, October 16). *Featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented for the Echo Verse Poetry Series at 1515 Broadway, Detroit, MI.

Hernandez, C., Henze, A., & Williams, E. J. (2009, October 15). *Featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented for They Say Poetry Thursdays at They Say, Detroit, MI.

Hernandez, C., Henze, A., & Williams, E. J. (2009, October 13). *Featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented at The TV Lounge, Detroit, MI.

Hernandez, C., Henze, A., & Williams, E. J. (2009, October 12). *Featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented at The Byte This anniversary party at Cliff Bells, Detroit, MI.

Hernandez, C., Henze, A., & Williams, E. J. (2009, October 11). *Featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented for the Spoken Soul Food Sundays at Midtown Arts & Coffee Lounge.

Henze, A., Hernandez, C., & Williams, E. J. (2009, October 9). *Spoken word showcase featuring Adam, Matt, and Eric.* Presented at the Warren Regional Juvenile Detention Center, Bowling Green, KY.

Henze, A. & Hernandez, C. (2009, October 8). *Poetry slam featuring The Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented at Tidball's, Bowling Green, KY.

Henze, A. (2009, October 1). *Featuring Adam Henzbo*. Presented for The Cypher at Café 331, Jacksonville, FL.

Poetry Readings. Lectures, and Theatrical Performances (cont.)

Hernandez, C. & Henze, A. (2009, September 21). *Featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented at The Hideout Theatre, Austin, TX.

Hernandez, C. & Henze, A. (2009, September 20). *Featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour*. Presented for Kick Butt Poetry at Kick Butt Coffee Music & Booze, Austin, TX.

Hernandez, C. & Henze, A. (2009, September 19). *Poetry night*. Presented at G's and Z's Coffee Shop, Houston, TX.

Henze, A. & Hernandez, C. (2009, September 17). *Featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented for Neo Soul Poetry Lounge, Austin, TX.

Henze, A. & Hernandez, C. (2009, September 17). *Featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented for Soul Sessions at The Boys and Girls Club, Austin, TX.

Henze, A. & Hernandez, C. (2009, September 16). *Featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented for the Austin Poetry Slam at the Electric Lounge, Austin, TX.

Hernandez, C. & Henze, A. (2009, September 15). *Featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour*. Presented for True Poetry Tuesdays at Sweet Lorraine's Jazz Club, New Orleans, LA.

Henze, A. & Hernandez, C. (2009, September 12). *Featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented at the Red Star Art Gallery, New Orleans, LA.

Henze, A. & Hernandez, C. (2009, September 11). *Featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented for BamaSlam at Eclipse Coffee House, Montevallo, AL.

Henze, A. & Hernandez, C. (2009, September 10). *Featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented at Urban Grind Coffee House, Atlanta, GA.

Henze, A. & Hernandez, C. (2009, September 8). *Featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented for Liquid Thoughts at Kats Café, Atlanta, GA.

Henze, A. (2009, September 3). *Featuring Adam Henzbo*. Presented for The Cypher at Café 331, Jacksonville, FL.

Henze, A. & Hernandez, C. (2009, August 6). *Poetry at the Ritz*. Presented at The Ritz Theatre & Museum, Jackson, FL.

Hernandez, C. & Henze, A. (2009, September 2). *Featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented for Resurrection at The Lobby/Garden Pub, St. Petersburg, FL.

Hernandez, C. & Henze, A. (2009, September 1). *Featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented for Black on Black Rhyme Tampa at The Jerk Hut, Tampa, FL.

Poetry Readings. Lectures, and Theatrical Performances (cont.)

Henze, A. & Hernandez, C. (2009, August 31). *Featuring art and poetry*. Presented for Amp@Studio620, St. Petersburg, FL.

Henze, A., Hernandez, C., & Nadeau, A. S. (2009, August 30). *The Got Jokes variety show*. Presented for Got Jokes at Tampa Bay Comedy Coconuts Comedy Club, Tampa, FL.

Henze, A. & Hernandez, C. (2009, August 30). *Featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented at Taiga Lounge Night Club Tampa, Tampa, FL.

Henze, A., Hernandez, C., & Rod, O. (2009, August 29). *Featuring Adam Henzbo*. Presented on Poetry Is… Live on WMNF 88.5 FM, Tampa, FL.

West, M., Hernadez, C., & Henze, A. (2009, August 27) *Featuring Moe, Cuban, & Henzbo*. Presented for Black on Black Rhyme Tallahassee at the Aakhet Center/Amen Ra's Gallery, Tallahassee, FL.

Henze, A. & Hernandez, C. (2009, August 25). *Featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented for Verseworks at the Art Bar, Columbia, SC.

Henze, A. & Hernandez, C. (2009, August 23). *Featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented for Wits End Poetry at the Coffee Underground, Greenville, SC.

Hernandez, C. & Henze, A. (2009, August 21) *Featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour*. Presented for Slam Charlotte! at the McGlohon Theater, Charlotte, NC.

Hernandez, C. & Henze, A. (2009, August 20) *Featuring Cuban Hernandez*. Presented for UpStage Thursdays: Spoken Word & Live Music! at The Wine Up, Charlotte, NC.

Hernandez, C. & Henze, A. (2009, August 19). *Featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented at Allure Restaurant & Lounge, Charlotte, NC.

Henze, A. & Hernandez, C. (2009, August 18). *Featuring Adam Henzbo*. Presented for UpStage Tuesdays: Spoken Word & Live Music! at The Wine Up, Charlotte, NC.

Henze, A. & Hernandez, C. (2009, August 15). *Featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented for Saturday Night Live at The Literary Café, Miami, FL.

Henze, A., Hernandez, C., & Williams, E. J. (2009, August 14). *The revival experiment.* Presented at the El Palacio Hotel, Miami, FL.

Henze, A. (2009, August 13) *Featuring Adam Henzbo.* Presented for Blue Magic Thursday at Indigo 7, Miami, FL.

Henze, A., Hernandez, C., & Truth, O. (2009, August 12) *Five features.* Presented at RJ's Lounge, West Palm Beach, FL.

Poetry Readings. Lectures, and Theatrical Performances (cont.)

Henze, A. & Hernandez, C. (2009, August 11) *Featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented for Culture Clash at The Literary Café, Miami, FL.

Henze, A. & Hernandez, C. (2009, August 10) *Funny poetry, featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour.* Presented for Mellow Mondays at Bluster's, Hollywood, FL.

Hernandez, C., Henze, A., Williams, E. J., Walton, J. (2009, August 6). *Featuring the Sunshine Bluegrass Tour*. Presented for The Cypher at Café 331, Jacksonville, FL.

Hernandez, C. & Henze, A. (2009, August 6). *Poetry at the Ritz*. Presented at The Ritz Theatre & Museum, Jackson, FL.

A salute to black history. (2009, February 26). Presented at the Warren Regional Juvenile Detention Center, Bowling Green, KY.

Veterans Day salute. (2008, November 11). Presented at the Warren Regional Juvenile Detention Center, Bowling Green, KY.

Henze, A. & Wright, C. (2008, February) *Poetry performance at book night.* Presented at Warren Elementary, Bowling Green, KY.

Henze, A. (2007, March 29). *Table 35.* Presented at Take Back the Night, Bowling Green, KY.

Henze, A. & McDonald, B. (2007, November). *Poetry and picture books.* Presented at Natcher Elementary School, Bowling Green, KY.

A miracle on Kentucky Street. (2006, December 15). Presented at the Warren Regional Juvenile Detention Center, Bowling Green, KY.

Henze, A. & McDonald, B. (2006, October 12). *Go green: Environmental showcase*. Present with the Western Kentucky University Women Studies Department at the Capitol Arts Center, Bowling Green, KY.

The Greenhouse Poetry, Inc. (2006, October 11). *A Greenhouse Poetry slam*. Presented in partnership with the Communication Ambassadors at Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY.

Henze, A. (2006, October 5). *Poetry slam featuring Adam Henzbo*. Presented at Jennica's Coffee House, Louisville, KY.

The Greenhouse Poetry, Inc. (2006, September 8). *Performance poetry showcase*. Presented at the Kaleidoscope Showcase at the Bowling Green Community Center, Bowling Green, KY.

Henze, A. & Bernaugh, S. (2006, September 14). *Poetry performance.* Presented for the Young Professionals of Bowling Green at the State Street Pub, Bowling Green, KY.

Poetry Readings. Lectures, and Theatrical Performances (cont.)

Henze, A., et al. (2006, August 20). *The Plight of the Waiter*. Presented with ASK! Arts of Southern Kentucky at the Capitol Arts Center, Bowling Green, KY.

Henze, A., et al. (2006, May 24) *Unearthed: An evening of oral interpretation.* Presented at UCLA's Raw Performance Art Series, Los Angeles, CA.