

Invitations and Celebrations

By Cathy Fraga

The Invitation

The idle chatter of sixth graders transformed into silence as poet Ayodele's rich timbred voice wove its spell in the classroom. Normal activity ground to a halt as students sat transfixed, listening to his descriptive poem "Home." This was their introduction to slam poetry and they delighted in the sound of it. It took three replays before they could begin to focus on how the piece was crafted. It was this lesson, and the ones that followed, that would spark their attempts at similar writing.

The most powerful lesson came in the form of a visit from an amazing group of Pioneer High School students and their English teacher, Jeff Kass. More than ninety middle school students and their teachers sat in the library as these performance poets spoke from their hearts about the significant events in their lives, allowing us a more intimate look at who they really were. Their cadence acted as an ebb and flow; tugging on the younger

students' imagination and willingness to risk it all the next time they sat down to write. Little did they suspect that the opportunity would soon present itself.

Following their dynamic presentation, two of the visiting performers, now turned writing mentors, were brought into the classroom. Under their guidance and inspiration, we began to examine, from a very close and personal perspective, the question, "Where are we from?" The results of those efforts are included in this publication. As with any work in progress, the students have occasionally revisited these attempts with the intentions of tweaking it or just to recall a time when their voices reached a different audience. We would like to thank Jeff Kass and his performing group of high school students for their help and encouragement with the reflective types of writing, and for the lasting impact it has had on us.

The Celebrations

Living Upstairs

I'm from living upstairs above my cousins.
I'm from creaky stairs and no cable TVs.
I'm from a place where guns go off and lives are cut short.
I'm from my mom and dad being as beautiful and handsome as butterflies.
I'm from a place where girls show off and act all hot like the sun,
But what they need to know is they are not.
I'm from sunny days, dark days, cloudy days and boring rainy days.
I'm from a place where my little brother talks non-stop,
Like someone plugged an Energizer battery into him.
He keeps going, and going, and going.
I'm from sleepy heads, wet beds, and heads hard as rock.
I'm from a place where my favorite rapper Eminem first started out,
Where cars are built, where Motown started and where we have the Renaissance every day of the week.
I'm from a place, I'm from a place,
I'm from a place called Detroit.
-Antwine Johnson



Antwine Johnson busy at work.



Desiree Davis spices up her writing with colorful illustrations.

Mississippi

I'm from Mississippi
 Where in the middle of winter right before you get cold,
 Another burning sun comes in.
 Where chicken is a daily meal,
 Where when you go to school, it seems you've gotten dumber.
 I'm from a place where tornado season lasts almost all year . . .
 A place where thunderstorms are daily,
 Where you can't get anywhere without getting hot.
 A place where there are 36-hour churches,
 Where the thieves steal, liars lie, players play,
 And ballers cross other ballers.
 I'm from a place where the poor get poorer and the rich move
 out.
 Where the famous are spoiled and the anonymous get jealous.
 I'm from the freestyle ghetto.
 I'm from Cold Springs, Mississippi.

-Jairus Fuqua

Where I'm From

Where am I from?
 I'm from a place where my dad is always gone.
 In order for us to live my dad earns money from
 A pretty easy job, or so someone would think.
 He's from traveling in this country . . .
 Hawaii, New York California, and more.
 He's from traveling out of this country . . .
 Africa, China, Korea and more.
 I'm from a place of wanting my dad to come home.
 Come home from the base, from the military, from 7-11.
 I'm from a place called Happiness when he does come home.
 My eyes burn from holding back the tears when I see him.
 My eyes burn from holding back the tears when he surprises
 me with the gifts he brings.
 I open my presents the same way I tear down my bed when
 I'm mad,
 With sheets everywhere.
 I make a big O with my lips to show my surprise with those
 gifts bought just for me.
 But do you know what the best gift of all is?
 Seeing my dad again.
 Where am I from?
 I am from too many moments of missing my dad.
 -Desiree Davis



Lynndon Carter uses class writing time to look up words to inspire his poetry.

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