

The Two Traditions:

Connecting with the History of Literature Instruction

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Making the Good Reader and Citizen: The History of Literature Instruction in American Schools



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Finna

By Nate Marshall

for Juanita & the Perspectives Leadership Academy Class of 2016

so this one time i was finna say finna in a academic context
& a voice in my head said shouldn't you be worried
about using a word that ain't a word & i was like word.

& for a long time that was how i let my life happen,
i let my mind tell me a million no's that the world
had implanted in me before i even formed questions.
i let my power be dulled by my fear of fitting.

but i remember a million finnas
i avoided to get here. like the day
them dudes jumped me off the bus & i was finna
get stomped out like a loose square. or the day
they got to shooting at the park & i was finna
catch one like an alley oop. or the day
my grandma died & my grades dropped & i was finna
not finish high school except i had a praying mama
& good teachers & poems to write. i'm thankful for all these finnas
that never were & when i remind myself
of who i've always been i remember why
my finna is so necessary.

finna comes from the southern phrase fixing to
like i come from my southern grandmothers & finna
is this word that reminds me about everything next.
even when i've been a broken boy i know i'm fixing to
get fixed. i'm finna be better. every dream i have is a finna
away from achievement. each new love i uncover is a finna
i unfold. every challenge i choose to meet & not let defeat me is a finna
i fight for.

my hope is like my language is like my people: it's Black
& it's brown & it's alive
& it's laughing & it's growing & it's alive
& it's learning & it's alive & it's fighting & it's alive
& it's finna
take on this wide world
with a whole slang for optimism.

The Border: A Double Sonnet

by [Alberto Ríos](#)

The border is a line that birds cannot see.
The border is a beautiful piece of paper folded carelessly in half.
The border is where flint first met steel, starting a century of fires.
The border is a belt that is too tight, holding things up but making it hard to breathe.
The border is a rusted hinge that does not bend.
The border is the blood clot in the river's vein.
The border says *stop* to the wind, but the wind speaks another language, and keeps going.
The border is a brand, the "Double-X" of barbed wire scarred into the skin of so many.
The border has always been a welcome stopping place but is now a stop sign, always red.
The border is a jump rope still there even after the game is finished.
The border is a real crack in an imaginary dam.
The border used to be an actual place, but now, it is the act of a thousand imaginations.
The border, the word *border*, sounds like *order*, but in this place they do not rhyme.
The border is a handshake that becomes a squeezing contest.
The border smells like cars at noon and wood smoke in the evening.
The border is the place between the two pages in a book where the spine is bent too far.
The border is two men in love with the same woman.
The border is an equation in search of an equals sign.
The border is the location of the factory where lightning and thunder are made.
The border is "NoNo" The Clown, who can't make anyone laugh.
The border is a locked door that has been promoted.
The border is a moat but without a castle on either side.
The border has become Checkpoint *Chale*.
The border is a place of plans constantly broken and repaired and broken.
The border is mighty, but even the parting of the seas created a path, not a barrier.
The border is a big, neat, clean, clear black line on a map that does not exist.
The border is the line in new bifocals: below, small things get bigger; above, nothing changes.
The border is a skunk with a white line down its back.

poets.org

Self-Portrait in a Wire Jacket

Monica Youn

To section off
is to intensify,

to deaden.
Some surfaces

cannot be salvaged.
Leave them

to lose function,
to persist only

as armature,
holding in place

those radiant
squares

of sensation—
the body a dichotomy

of flesh and
blood. Wait here

in the trellised
garden you

are becoming.
Soon you'll know

that the strictures
have themselves

become superfluous,
but at that point

you'll also know
that ungridded

you could no longer survive.

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Land Where My Father Died

Fatimah Asghar

land of buildings & no good manners land of sunless people & offspring of colonizers
land of no spice & small pox land of fake flowers land of shackle & branches made of
rope land of wire fences grabbing sky land that mispronounces my grief land that skins
my other land that laughs when my people die & paints targets on my future children's
faces land that steals & says *mine* land that plants mines & says go back land that
poisoned my mother & devoured her body land that makes my other language strange
on my tongue land that stripped our saris & clips haloes to its flag land that eliminates
cities land that says *homeland security* land that built the first bomb & the last land that
killed my father & then sent back his body land that made me orphan of thee I sing.

poets.org

You Rode a Loop

Rosa Alcalá

You rode your bike from your house on the corner to the dead end of the street, and turned it around at the factory, back to the corner again. This was the loop your mother let you ride, not along the avenue with its cavalcade of trucks, or up the block where Drac the Dropout waited to plunge his pointy incisors into virginal necks. You can't remember exactly your age, but you probably had a bike with a banana seat, and wore cutoff jeans and sweat socks to the knees. You are trying to be precise but everything is a carbon-like surface that scrolls by with pinpricks emitting memory's wavy threads. One is blindingly bright and lasts only seconds: You are riding your bike and the shadowy blots behind the factory windows' steel grates emit sounds that reach and wrap around you like a type of gravity that pulls down the face. You can't see them but what they say is what men say all day long, to women who are trying to get somewhere. It's not something you hadn't heard before. But until then, you only had your ass grabbed by boys your own age—boys you knew, who you could name—in a daily playground game in which teachers looked away. In another pin prick, you loop back to your house, where your mother is standing on the corner talking to neighbors. You tell her what the men said, and ask, does this mean I'm beautiful? What did she say? Try remembering: You are standing on the corner with your mother. You are standing on the corner. This pinprick emits no light; it is dark, it is her silence. Someday you will have a daughter and the dead end will become a cul de sac and all the factories will be shut down or at the edges of town, and the men behind screens will be monitored, blocked. And when things seem safe, and everything is green and historic and homey, you will let her walk from school to park, where you'll wait for her, thanks to a flexible schedule, on the corner. And when she walks daydreaming along the way and takes too long to reach you, the words they said will hang from the tree you wait under.

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Dinosaurs in the Hood

BY DANEZ SMITH

Let's make a movie called *Dinosaurs in the Hood*.
Jurassic Park meets *Friday* meets *The Pursuit of Happyness*.
There should be a scene where a little black boy is playing
with a toy dinosaur on the bus, then looks out the window
& sees the T. Rex, because there has to be a T. Rex.

Don't let Tarantino direct this. In his version, the boy plays
with a gun, the metaphor: black boys toy with their own lives,
the foreshadow to his end, the spitting image of his father.
Fuck that, the kid has a plastic Brontosaurus or Triceratops
& this is his proof of magic or God or Santa. I want a scene

where a cop car gets pooped on by a pterodactyl, a scene
where the corner store turns into a battle ground. Don't let
the Wayans brothers in this movie. I don't want any racist shit
about Asian people or overused Latino stereotypes.
This movie is about a neighborhood of royal folks —

children of slaves & immigrants & addicts & exiles — saving their town
from real-ass dinosaurs. I don't want some cheesy yet progressive
Hmong sexy hot dude hero with a funny yet strong commanding
black girl buddy-cop film. This is not a vehicle for Will Smith
& Sofia Vergara. I want grandmas on the front porch taking out raptors

with guns they hid in walls & under mattresses. I want those little spitty,
screamy dinosaurs. I want Cicely Tyson to make a speech, maybe two.
I want Viola Davis to save the city in the last scene with a black fist afro pick
through the last dinosaur's long, cold-blood neck. But this can't be
a black movie. This can't be a black movie. This movie can't be dismissed

because of its cast or its audience. This movie can't be a metaphor
for black people & extinction. This movie can't be about race.
This movie can't be about black pain or cause black people pain.
This movie can't be about a long history of having a long history with hurt.
This movie can't be about race. Nobody can say nigga in this movie

who can't say it to my face in public. No chicken jokes in this movie.
No bullets in the heroes. & no one kills the black boy. & no one kills
the black boy. & no one kills the black boy. Besides, the only reason
I want to make this is for that first scene anyway: the little black boy
on the bus with a toy dinosaur, his eyes wide & endless

his dreams possible, pulsing, & right there.

Black Boys Play the Classics

BY TOI DERRICOTTE

The most popular “act” in
Penn Station
is the three black kids in ratty
sneakers & T-shirts playing
two violins and a cello—Brahms.
White men in business suits
have already dug into their pockets
as they pass and they toss in
a dollar or two without stopping.
Brown men in work-soiled khakis
stand with their mouths open,
arms crossed on their bellies
as if they themselves have always
wanted to attempt those bars.
One white boy, three, sits
cross-legged in front of his
idols—in ecstasy—
their slick, dark faces,
their thin, wiry arms,
who must begin to look
like angels!
Why does this trembling
pull us?

A: *Beneath the surface we are one.*

B: *Amazing! I did not think that they could speak this tongue.*

[Poetry Foundation](#)

Harlem

BY LANGSTON HUGHES

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

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