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For more information and to submit a poem, visit [ilhumanities.org/poetry](http://ilhumanities.org/poetry).  
If you have questions, contact Mark Hall at mark.hallett@ilhumanities.org.
### 7TH GRADE (pages: 17 - 18)

- “My Grandfather’s Broken Camera” by Noa Stern Frede – Ancona School, Chicago
- “I am made of mess” by Zoe Harris – Ancona School, Chicago

### 8TH GRADE (pages: 19 - 21)

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- “The Oreo LP” by Allen White – Oak Park & River Forest High School, Oak Park

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- “Fears in exile” by Sonam Yangzom Rikha – Walter Payton College Prep, Chicago
- “On Etching Your Legacy” by Aanika Pfister – Lane Tech College Prep, Chicago

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If you have questions, contact Mark Hallett at mark.hallett@ilhumanities.org.
Sitting beside her on the couch,

I see the different colors of yarn.

It is soft.

I hear the clicking needles.

My MAMA is teaching me to be excited for my scarf to be done.
You with me?
I dream of everyone.
I dream we are free.
Free as sparrows singing beautiful songs and flies high all day long.

I dream with everyone.
Together we dream and work for freedom. The freedom to dream. To be. The freedom to breathe.

I am a black boy made of dreams and joy.
Be free, dream with me.
Ducklings

Baby ducklings are a coming,
Baby ducklings are a coming in spring.
Baby ducklings are a singin’,
Baby ducklings are a singin’ well.
Baby ducklings’ wings are yellow,
Baby ducklings’ wings are yellow and brown.
Baby ducklings see a great blue heron,
Baby ducklings see a great blue heron flying around.
On the Rug by Catherine Stanislawski

Safe and snug
Warm and cozy
All around me
Are my friends

Teacher reads
Us a story
We are happy
I miss school
The Water’s Daughter

I sit at the edge of the bay
watching all the horses eating their hay
I watch the water swishing in and out
I love being the water's daughter.

I dive to the water
I turn into a mermaid
A beautiful tail, silver and gold
So beautiful
So bold

The waves rush over me, just like the wind in a tornado.
They crash, thrash and bash over me.
I don’t feel them one bit.
Clearly dad is mad.
The Green Room

She must like to read
say the bookshelves piled with books.

She must make art
say the bag of markers in her desk and the clay bowl painted in glaze on her dresser.

She must like dogs
say the many dog stuffed animals and the dog poster above her bed.

And she’s bold
says the green room.
**Frenemy**

Look up at the sky, the darkness descends
I wish that this grim boredom would just end
The world is so overwhelmingly grey
Time feels like it is running on delay
Boredom makes my mind blank, like a plain sheet
But this is the feeling that I will beat
Sitting here staring at the dreary wall
But I will never ever give up or fall
Boredom will never ever be my friend
My joy and happiness will never end
Even the dark clouds have called it a day
My sense of adventure whisks me away
Everyone look at what’s on arrivals
My joy is back it is a revival
Winter Stuff

Hot chocolate
    in
my cup
I was following
    the
    snowflakes
warm blanket
    on
my
    face
    gingerbread man
running
    away
ice-skates
    covering
my
    feet
Imagination

She swims in the air,
Flies in the sea,
Leaps onto the lemony drops of
Golden rain.
She whispers to the clouds,
Calls to the wind,
Reads the dents written into the
Petals of the rainbow flowers.
She seeks the smell
Of burning parchment,
Sings at the top of the redwood,
Just over there,
She lives where she wants,
For imagination takes her everywhere.

By Tal Margot Neiman
4th grade, University of Chicago
Laboratory Schools, Chicago, IL
Linear Dodge in Green Leaves

Bright red cardinal, sitting in a walnut tree. He’s gazing serenely over the landscape.
I saw him with binoculars. Tree trunk like a tube,
It’s smooth with a lot of little bumps and rough in places.
And this one is a melted candle, its bark is like shredded paper that’s been pasted back on.
This old redbud with its crispy seed pods has about 500 blossoms. Here’s a shady tree
Full of summery leaves even though it’s only May first. Radiant, neon, this color is saying
‘Linear Dodge’ to me. A robin flashing through the sky, so close to my face.
This cardinal’s call is like an arcade game laser gun,
Peeeeeew, peeeeeeew, pew-pew-pew-pew-pew.
The Norway maple has holes in its sides where branches used to be. The English Oak has
Tiny buds that look like magnets from here. I’ll go back across the field. Earlier, in the winter,
There were red berries on this tree, but these little white buds are prettier. There’s so much
Shade under here. The leaves are soft, not like chenille, but silkily smooth like flower petals.
This leaf smells like it looks. I’m immersed in green. I can kinda see the view, but the branches block
Out all the bad parts. Wonder what kind of bird that is, sounding expectant and annoyed,
Like it’s saying, Come on! What are you waiting for? Get that.
ONE OF THOSE DAYS

It’s one of those days. You know the type. Air so thick it makes you sleepy. A day where temperature and anxiety fall in a blender on puree mode. A day where false warmth blankets the air, but the chill still creeps up your back. You shiver violently. It’s one of those days where you open your mouth, to greedily suck up the moist air, but it leaves you more parched than before. It’s one of those days where there was a storm, and the ghost of lightning hangs in the air, making your hair stand up as you walk. It’s one of those days where there’s no sun, but your shadow stalks you anyway. It waits for the right moment to peel up off of the ground and strangle you, yanking you down, down, down…
The Ganges

The people's prayers flow through the Ganges
like a dolphin gliding through the sea.
The river shimmers
as the sunset glows via heavenly light
touching all souls.
Ganga watches carelessly
from the clouds
as cozy as a pillow
The river of the Ganges flows as soft and silent as the
hum of a hummingbird.
Ganga’s lotus flower
slowly floats from the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal.
    SPLASH!
The luminous and spiritual catfish
dance out of the water as delicate
as a ballerina.
The waves clash together like Shiva’s hand and drum.
Ganga’s spirit will
always flow in the glistening water
of the Ganges.
I Remember India

I remember sunny India in December.

I remember the lush, juicy mangoes from the fruit vendors. My mom told me the vendors lived on those carts due to poverty in India. I felt so sad that night.

I remember all the cooking transpiring, one floor, another, and another, all cooking dahl and rice. I could hear the water bubbling with the flavorful dahl inside. The dahl talked to me, beckoning me to devour it, but I refused.

I remember being picky and only eating oatmeal for breakfast. Everyone wanted me to eat dahl but I refused. I was like the ugly duckling, sitting in the corner, eating oatmeal with more than enough brown sugar.

I remember talking day and night to my eager family all wanting to know about what has happened in America. I felt bored but realized how interesting life is in India.

I remember all the dogs barking as if the world was ending. My mom kept on complaining about all the dogs. People were yelling in languages I could not understand outside our house. I could hear my cousins, aunts, and uncles, praying through the night.
I was told to write a poem, for Poems in your Pocket
It was from Ms. Smith  And I knew I couldn’t drop it
I tried to write a poem  While sitting in bed
But I couldn’t think of one  So I tried the floor instead.
I thought about it hard, But one didn’t come to me
So I tried to change the subject  A poem about what I see.
But I couldn’t see much, Because my eyes were closed.
And my room is kind of lame  So I didn’t want to be exposed.
So then I just sat there,  Wondering what to do.
When it came to me, a poem!  From a certain point of view
A poem, Where you can see in my head,
And I thought of that poem, The one you’ve already read.
I am from my grandfather’s broken camera.
You know, the one that used to take pictures, oh so long ago?
I am from games -- word games, and decks of cards that are never full.
I am from the dent in the wall from when I roller skated indoors and fell.
That dent that we have tried to patch too many times, and now it’s just a lump.
I am from discarded tiles from construction,
Tiger lillies overflowing the backyard,
And the bird feeder that is always emptied by squirrels.
I am from the cafe with the chair that no one ever sits in.
From the street corner that held so many bake sales,
From the dry cleaners with the Guatemalan woman who always has a smile.
From “dial it back’s” and “you’re at a level 10’s”
These things make me who I am.
I am from crispy fried eggs,
Butterscotch apple pies,
Muffins that aren’t really muffins, but we love them anyway.
And I am from that big book of pictures that documents our lives.
And with every freshly printed photograph, we slip it into its folds.
As well as the pictures from my grandfather’s broken camera.
We slip those in there too.
Name: Zoe

I am made of mess,
Of cats always underfoot
Made of the scrape and blood
of falling off a bike
I am made of the little trees outside the window,
Made of the snow mountain
in the parking lot every winter

I am made of books I finished in a weekend
And of never finishing movies.
I am made of “it’s too late”
And “don’t slam the door”.
I am made of soccer on the midway
Where I would climb every tree.

I am made of obsessing over shows
Of bootlegged websites to watch them on
I am made of wandering the neighborhood
Until I have to rely on my friend to get back home.
I am made of musicals,
Of particular songs I love
And being brought back in time
By things I saw or heard months ago
I am made of games
Of movies
Of people
Of places.
Mixed People Poem

To the white boy in the back of
the room who saw me walk up
with my natural hair and my
‘cite black women’ shirt --

I know what you’re thinking.

Not another inequality poem.

Not another oppression poem.

Not another black-boy-shot-by-a-police-officer-because-he-had-his-
Hood-up-poem.

Not another black people poem.

Well guess what.

This is a mixed people poem

[A white chocolate and dark chocolate taste better together poem]

This is a what-even-are-you poem.

This is a too-white-to-be-black
too-black-to-be-white-poem.

And just because My skin tone is closer
to the one on your face than the one
on my father’s, does not mean you
can touch my hair.

Does not allow you to talk about
my people--half of them--
like they are nothing.
Like they are just another page in your
history books,

just another forgotten thought
In your head

And I know if we were in a room full of black people I’d be the first

you’d talk to

because I look the least threatening
the least angry.

Just because I’m not the ‘angry black girl’ the world expects, doesn’t mean I can’t be.

Doesn’t mean I’m a docile animal you can talk to like I’m stupid.

I’m not stupid.
2020

If loneliness had a scent
It would be harsh smoke and sweet roses.
The sound of laughter from afar and
The sight of cars driving away.
A community of people who don’t know
Each other’s names.

Trees lining the streets, as far apart as we would be
Even without a virus to keep us that way.
Nothing more than a
“Hey,
   How are you!”
Without a question mark at the end,
A divided society with society to blame.

If loneliness had a taste
It would be the meals we eat by ourselves
When we don’t have a virus to blame.
And if you could hold loneliness in your hand
It would be the thorns of the rose
Scarring you with shame
For the times you’ve said
“Hey,
   How are you!”
To a nameless face,
Without a question mark at the end.
Paper Room

You never know what you will find.
Seated in a chair made of cowhide,
Cold metal armrests still shiny, as if never used.
Warm seat worn from days long spent on it.

Pens and pencils in every color.
Dusty textbooks that line the shelves,
Lacking creases and cracks.
The scent of old books fills the room.

Frames, each one carrying a relative’s face
Frozen in time, forced to smile all day.
Rain crashes into the window,
The green of the leaves that lure you,
And the red of the bricks that confines you

In the leathery seat, time passes quicker,
Peace envelops me.
At least here, no voices call to me, nagging.
The only visitors, while infrequent, are those who come for sanctuary.

The gentle sound of computer keys being tapped,
The sound of the pencil scratching against the paper,
And I remember everything.
Pandora’s Box

Here it is.
Shiny and new.
With bundles of lace and pieces of glitter going around the side.
An amusing sight of undiscovered glory with bits of subtle accents along the rim.

What’s inside?

Tell me, is it a garden of shining stars?
A collection of bouncing red VY Canis Majoris’?
Or bunches of bright blue Vegas that sparkle across long fields of constellations?
Are there different weeds of twinkly lights that grow next to Astraeus’ sensational creations?

Or, do you hold the sky like a canvas with painted winds?
A synchronized pattern of stratocumulus masses with a splash of pastel cirrus clouds.
Is the sun designed with eccentric shapes,
or is it carefully traced with crayons?

Zeus, please, give me a hint.
Is this simply a senseless box?
An assortment of unanswered questions.
Am I observing hidden secrets whose truths are too hard to comprehend?
Be honest, am I holding a capsule full of empty space that you no longer need to defend?

I beg of you!
Your mystery would be kept with me.

Tell me, are there raging fires that can boil the concrete into bits of dust?
Is there an unbearable pressure that can so easily crush the drums of our ears?
Are there turbulent winds that can so easily peel off the layers of the ground?
Do you hold spirits that can silence the buzz of the streets by setting spells and casting curses?
Or, violent waves that hold creatures whose claws have scratched up the ocean floor?

Can these concealed mysteries be so bad?
What can possibly be held in this chest that you can’t disclose to me?
Are there tiny nuggets of gold or a river of glistening silver?
Consider me as one of your own.
I’ll deliver your mail, clean off your swords, or even dust off your throne!
Hera, reason with him.
Tell him he’s wrong.
Athena, let me borrow your sword to crack open the latch.
Fortuna, promise me my luck has stacked upon itself.

Flip the coin.
Spin the wheel.
Declare me the successor.

I am just like you.
Don’t take my curiosity as hidden animosity.
I promise I’ll share.

I just want to take a peek.
A quick glance.
A glimpse of the grandeur you have guarded for so long.
I can take the weight off your shoulders.

A look inside is all I need.
My fingers can easily grip onto the sides as if it were carved for me to hold.
Blinding lights and shrieking cries creep underneath the tiny opening.

You said it was dangerous.
You warned me of the danger the secrecy closed within this contraption holds.
Well, I guess you get what you ask for.
My Dad

My dad has the mind of an architect
The body of a friendly giant, the spirit of a bird and the job of a handyman
I love my dad, because of all of the sacrifices he made for me
All the times he was there for me when he didn’t have to be
My love for my dad comes from his pain tolerance
For saws cutting his fingers like little pricks in the back of his mind
So he can come home and put a few more pennies in my piggy bank
I love my dad because he ignored his aching bones after a ten hour work day
So that I could sit on top of his shoulders and watch the fireworks on 4th of July
My love for him comes from him rolling lemon oil on my forehead
At 1 o’clock at night when I have a bad dream
Even though he hasn’t slept in weeks, in fear of my mom coming home and causing a scene
He protected me from her words thrown like daggers, cut like long gashes
The words “I hate you!” made scars, but they don’t bother me now
Because I had a dad that made up for her lack of affection or my lack of remembrance
And when she threw a remote at the wall near my head
He covered my ears and prayed over me
and when things got worse and my sister became my mother, my dad supported us through it all
Now he’s older and he still pushes himself to feed him, his second family, and me
Sometimes I wonder when his body will break down
Like the rusted pickup truck that my dad loved, that he had to sell
I wonder when his legs will fail him and he won’t be able to go on walks with me
And I hope he’ll be able to walk me down the aisle and dance with me on my wedding day
But I still wonder when his countless surgeries will be pointless
And he won’t be able to kayak in the fox river because of all the weight he put on his body
Because of all the times he took jobs that killed his shoulders and knees
So he could pay the bills
So he could buy me battered teddy bear that said ‘God danced the day you were born’
So that I would know I was loved and had a purpose
And that I wasn’t doomed because of the environment I grew up in
My dad taught me that love isn’t just telling it’s showing someone you love them
Because every day that I can remember he showed me he loved me
I wish I could take away every scar he got for me
That he covered up with duct tape because he didn’t have band-aids
I wish I could take away every ounce of pain that he feels because of me and endure it myself
I wish I could give him the 33 years of his life back
So he could go on mission trips like he’s dreamed of
And as I watch him get stepped on again and again by his own customers
Stabbed in the back too many times to feel it anymore
I wonder if heaven is the only place he can rest
And as selfish as it is, I don’t want him to rest, I don’t want him to leave me
So I wish god would recognize everything he’s ever done, every obstacle he’s overcome
And reward him with the happiness he deserves
Because there has to be a reason why he’s going through all this pain
There has to be a reason and it couldn’t have been just for me, because I don’t deserve it
I think about all the money that he saved up for retirement
That was washed away from shopping sprees, all 33 years of hard work gone
Because she spent it on things we didn’t need
And he still tells me to this day, That he’s saving up for my degree
So that I can have a better life and not have to work like he did, at age 14
Boys With Missing Flowers: Endangered and Growing

i'm daydreaming about gardens and flowers
but when a girl says “like when boys get raped”
the earthy scent disappears
how can you have a conversation about boys being raped without a boy that was raped?
i wonder if every male survivor heard it too
i wonder if she knows i am here
or if the class can feel my presence fading
i wonder if i will get my points for being present and engaged

when the girl says “like when boys get raped”
i don’t know if i should be the living testimony or be alive at all
i would never throw my own pity party
or put myself in the position for the boys in class to call me weak
i’m already gay enough

i sit there and listen
close my eyes and try to go back to the garden but i’m taken somewhere else
i am a little boy again
scared and innocent and dazed and
a virgin

i’ve never felt so uncomfortable in my own home
these floorboards watched me scream
and i wished they had done something about it
i wish they had told me
that my flower could be picked too
whether i like it or not

i wish i knew other boys with flowers stolen from them
maybe they could remind me what a full garden feels like
take the patches left in us and make a safe haven

but when the girl says “like when boys get raped”
i feel like an endangered species
afraid to stand on my own two feet
all i can say is nothing
all i can do is replay that quote
again and again and again
and hope for a topic change
Imagine not using your real name on applications
Because your name contains too many syllables
And you're afraid your race may seep through the page
Imagine being a minority
Being a minority makes everything about me minuscule
Victim turned into defendant
Freedom of speech turned something more tasteful
Something that you can more easily digest
Why is my saying the n word an invitation for you to say it as well
Is it because
In your eyes, Saying the n word is the only privilege I have
The one thing I can do that you can’t
So you want to take that from me as well
Can we please have one thing to ourselves
If this word was used to oppress my people
Why can’t I use it as a way to reunite my people
Why can't I turn it into some more tasteful as well
So I season this word with lemon pepper and liberation
And cook it so hot that it burns my tongue like whips enclosed in white knuckles
So if I choose to regurgitate the word that used to hurt like alcohol on open wounds
Then I should have the right, Not anyone else
My people have to dig graves deep enough to bury their black vernacular
When you use my slang like you created it
You just like my culture
Or the parts that make you look good
So you get blonde boxer braids
And do your edges with our blood, sweat, and tears
Can you imagine having to wear your hair in protective styles
Because you natural hair showcases too much of your race
Identifies too much with your hard owned roots and culture
There’s nothing in your hair that you need to protect to be get a job
2019 looked more like 1920
The only difference is
You don't have to sing songs loud enough to overbear slave chants that echo in your head
You only have to rap songs loud enough to overbear the word nigga that echoes in you head
And questions like when it’s okay to say it
Or if it ever is and it’s not
skin beaten black and blue with this word
So you don’t have the the right to write, sing, or say the word nigga
Unless you suffered the same fate
Unless this word was ingrained in the scars of your ancestors
Not engraved in the whips in the hands of your ancestors
You cannot say it
Not for education purposes
Not because the kids at your old school were ignorant enough to let you say it
No, My oppression is not the punchline to your joke
It’s not the plot twist in you dark humour
Unless this word was hung from the same tree that you were
Never got my 40 acres, so I took a 5 letter word
You cannot say it
The Oreo LP
I never really asked for the record I was given
Say it ain’t my fault, “I was born a little different”
Bumping to my own mixtape of mental illness(es)
Passed down like an heirloom, and I’m just the remix

Welcome to the Allen White LP
Fun fact: play it backwards, and you’ll hear all the “help mes”
There’s no satanic message just impressions of depression
That were left from drummin fingers ‘stead of listening to lessons
Feelin nervous, lackin purpose, and my tracks are all erratic
Prescription pills don’t really fill me, they just multicolored plastic

Depression was the very first track on my album
Learned the lyrics in 7th grade, wrapped me up and stuck like gum
Too broke to pay attention when I started going numb
Couldn’t even count my blessings cuz my grades proved I was dumb

Attention: Deficit High Definition television
Gets inside your mind and rots it like bananas in your kitchen
Second song on my record, and its beat is always skipping
It’s when your brain decides your fate ‘fore you give it permission

Doubt makes you feel like all your words are songs that won’t be heard
Feels like you’re forging broken bars with butterfinger words
You murmur to yourself that “tomorrow you’ll get help”
But the second you wake up, mourning hits you like a belt

You dug your dreaded roots as soon you screwed all your deadlines
You pulled until you gentrified your scalp like it was redlined
They found you barely breathing like a Still Great White
Always think about that night, can never keep it off the record

Reverbing regrets like a lyrical mess,
regressing to all your old songs
Hit the track like a race, feel it’s freezing
embrace, as the artists of past sing along
Say I’m a mic with no Stan, bars I spit dry as sand, tongue twist and tells me “I’m wrong”
But my beat is defeatist, satisfactions elitist,
tongues weakened, can’t seem to grow strong

How can you drop an album and have it not feel like a flop?
Why do I play the fall, but skip all the rising to the top?
Every lyric that I got was a better artist’s sample
How can I ever lead if I follow by example?
Fears in exile

Momola, I’m afraid
Afraid that you won’t be able to return to the home you left
Where the towns once filled with gorshey
Are now filled with silence and the hum of Chinese surveillance

Momola, I’m afraid
Afraid that the Buddhist monasteries with playful monks
And libraries of ancient Tibetan scrolls
Are now empty

Momola, I’m afraid
Afraid that the history of our people
Our resilient, loving people
Will be rewritten and forgotten

Momola, I’m afraid
Afraid that my native tongue has now turned foreign
Where I stumble and struggle to convey simple thoughts
In my broken Tibetan

Momola, I’m afraid
Afraid that when fall comes and you join your friends
Finding new life in an never ending cycle of being
I too, won’t be able to return to your home.

*Momola = Grandma
*Gorshey = Tibetan tradition circle dance
On Etching Your Legacy

Rip the waves and the water
Into a spitting image of your face

Toss the chieftain into the ocean
Make each straight palm tree bow
So its bark gets a backache
Crush beach rocks until they match the texture and color of your skin

Fill coconuts with sweet milk then shut them
In beige trap
Hard as your kneecap
Sip from them like sherry and
Grow strong and
Conquer
And do not thank them
And begin etching your name into limestone

Sink your goddess fingernails into the sand and
Heave up all the precious ignatius rocks humanity shall never touch
And find, hiding in the dunes
An oyster

You are it’s righteous, heroic
Dictator-Queen-Savior
For how many centuries was
Oyster talking over you?
Tiny and Sheltered and Opinionated
Ask it if it knows that your potential
Pulls the current and rules the tide.

If it’s ignorant and incorrect
Abandon it at sea.
Kick the sand into submission
And for its insolence
Make it stink of fish
Fill your kingdom with loyal finned citizens
And have each one of your decrees be so
Revolutionary
The seashells whisper your name for centuries

Goddess,
Etch your name into limestone
So the sea can soak it up
And will never forget you.