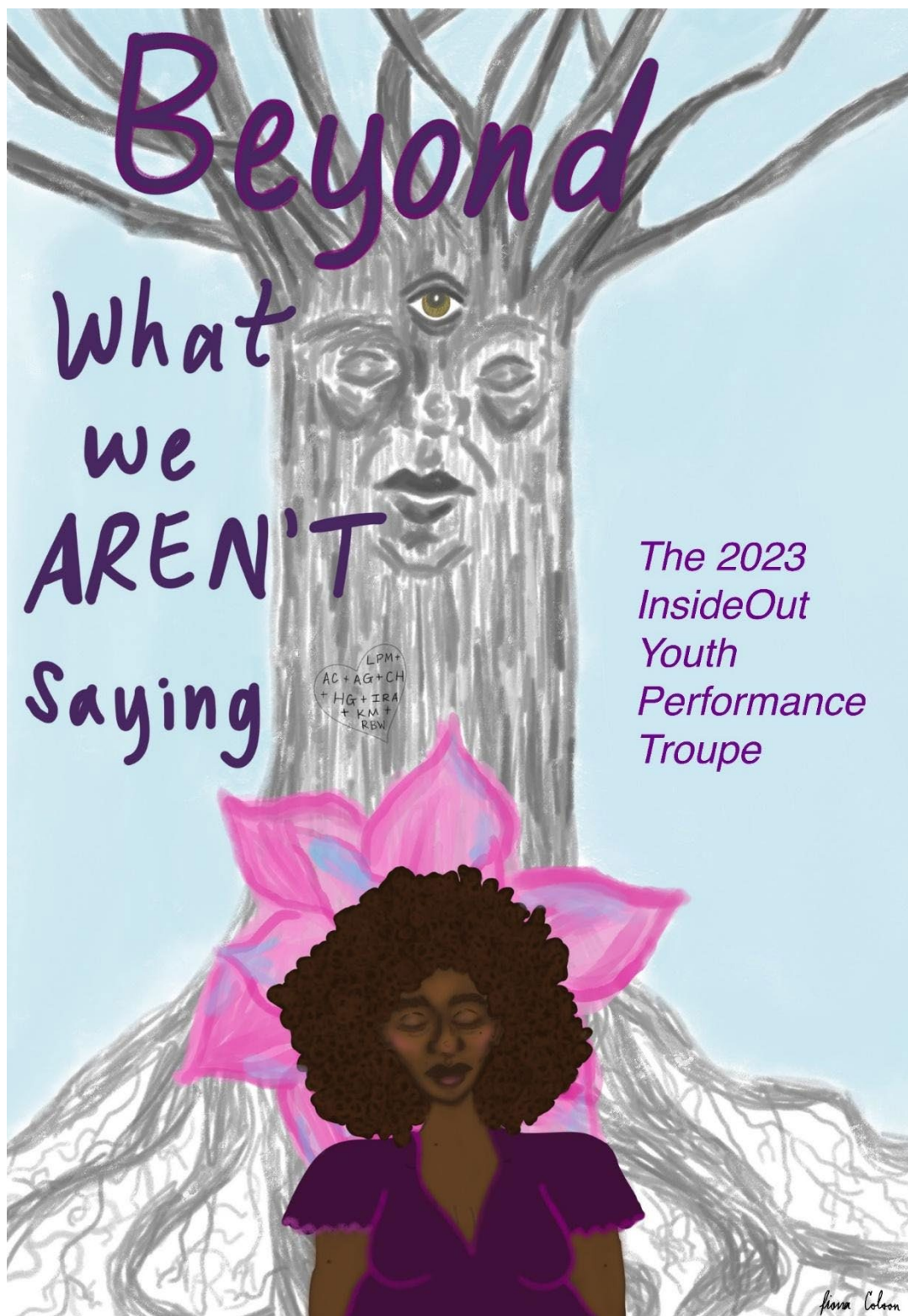




Every year I tell myself that I'm not going to get too caught up with these youth poets. I'm going to teach my class, coach these kids, and keep it moving. Every single year I **fail** at this task.

The 2023 InsideOut Youth Performance Troupe have taken up space in my heart just like every other performance troupe or slam team I've coached in this program. It is a quiet badge of honor to know that my art, my coaching, my *life* has touched these brilliant young artists in a tangible way. It is beautiful and scary and humbling to have that power. Moreover, I am moved year over year by the way these young poets inspire me. It's an even exchange. I am not the Yoda in the room. I am an eager and active student as much as I am an educator and coach. Like every troupe before them, these babies have enriched my art, helped me to age backwards with their youthfulness, and have given me a hope for a positive future.

Highlights of this season include:

- **Ingrid** confidently stepping into the role of a host and emcee at our open mic events. She is full of great energy and humor, and everyone feels welcomed and safe on every stage she's hosting.
- **Charisma and Adrian** bodying the *Love Letters To Detroit* workshop and open mic. They left mouths opened and hearts exploding after they took the stage.
- **Kya and Charisma** crushing their stage performances with **Teen Hype** at the Marygrove Theatre. These two brilliant artists created new work and incorporated it into a teen-led and curated play.
- **Hazel** bringing us to tears with the transparency of her work when she performed at this year's chapbook debut.
- Being a part of the dream team of **Alana Gracey and Rico Bruce Wade**. We are a brilliant trifecta, Black excellence, and an incredible trio. It is a pleasure doing this work with all of you.

The winds of change are blowing for InsideOut Literary Arts. We are gathering in person more. The expectation of writing and performing work that is both quality and powerful has been amplified. My beautiful babies have stepped up to the task. From performing at the opening of new parks in front of city leaders including the Mayor, to making our second annual *If The River Could Sing* festival a huge success with their performances, the 2023 Youth Performance Troupe has had an exceptional year.

Beyond What We Aren't Saying invites the reader to take a second, third, maybe even fourth look at the human behind the words on the page. These poems are authentically the voice of each artist. They invite us to view the world with more depth and consideration. They force us to understand the weight and power of our thoughts and feelings. Most importantly, these poems are a beautiful reflection of our future leaders. Let me tell you, the world looks incredibly brighter. We're all going to be alright with these brilliant babies holding us down.

As always, I remain in awe that I've been afforded the opportunity to flick a switch on in these talented artists. They don't *need* me. They welcome me into their spaces. They willingly show me glimpses of their worlds and the things that make them tick. But they don't need me. We need THEM.

Take their words into yourself and then look beyond what they aren't saying and bravely change the world around you.

La Shaun phoenix Moore
Coach. Mentor. Fangirl.
Hybrid World 2023

Working with the 2023 InsideOut Youth Performance Troupe this year has been such an experience. Interrogating texts, writing together, and then sharing our work has made me a better writer. Being in this bi-generational community of poets has been one of my favorite parts of this entire year.

One of the things we talk about ALL THE TIME is how, because we're writing poetry not prose, even when we're telling a story, every word has to count. Every space and line and punctuation mark means something. It's all deliberate. We wrote what we wrote. On purpose.

And yet . . .

This year, Kya, Ingrid, Hazel, Adrian, and Charisma have been performing and sharing parts of themselves on the stage. They've also spent time writing and are ready to share on the page.

And yet . . .

Even in poetry – even when we make sure every word is doing what we want it to do – things are still left unsaid. On purpose. There's still room to read between the lines. We know that every reader brings their own emotions and experiences to what they're reading. We welcome that with *Beyond What We Aren't Saying*. Poetry is individual, and it can also touch the entire world. The poems in this book tell very specific stories while leaving space beyond what is and isn't expressed here. This is the magic of poetry; you add yourself and give the poem life beyond its original meaning.

I hope you read this work with an openness that allows you to ask yourself what is *Beyond What We Aren't Saying*.

Alana Gracey
YTP Coach and Teaching Artist

InsideOut began the journey of redesigning Citywide Poets' Advanced Artistic Opportunities through the inevitable loom of 2020, when the fabric of our teen-centered program, by necessity, came undone. In 2023, after just a few years that felt too many like a decade, there is no question that the layers of the Performance Troupe program are strong and vibrant; each lesson a quality thread interlocking with student's voices, desires and visions.

We don't have it all figured out - the students do. They each become a complex tapestry of artistic knowledge, and curiosity, and life experience, and, and, and... Then they are gracious and courageous enough to share it with all of us. This year's Troupe, of course, is no exception. Since Spring they've become a supportive community, honed their craft, written poems to the River, featured on the Cover of The Metro Times and now have written their own Chapbook. This group and all of the ones before them are a part of Detroit History now. Part of a legacy that highlights how turmoil is disassembled and repurposed through the minds of creatives. A documentation of Joy in its rawest forms.

Lastly, even though while writing this I know with all of my heart that they will want to edit themselves out, it is literally impossible to see this new growth without acknowledging the facilitators who have seen these students through Spring of 2023 to now and beyond: Alana Gracey and Phoenix. They coach, and mentor, and challenge, and lead, and, and, and. Despite every effort these two make to teach, Adrian, Charisma, Hazel, Ingrid, and Kai have all been the ones who actually taught Alana and Phoenix. That is just as important - having adults who absorb what our most powerful voices have to say and actively use those words every day of their lives. This, and only this, is how all of us keep rejuvenating.

Justin Rogers
Citywide Poets Manager



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InsideOut Literary Arts *"inspires and equips young people to think critically, create bravely and share their voices with the world."*

Citywide Poets is a writing community that meets weekly at various sites across the city of Detroit, and offers a number of open mic and performance opportunities. The InsideOut Youth Performance Troupe members are the official youth community ambassadors for InsideOut Literary Arts.

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Adrian Coleman

Adrian Coleman (he/they) is a 16-year-old writer that is a part of the 2023 Youth Performance Troupe with InsideOut and has been a part of InsideOut Literary Arts since 7th grade. Adrian is in their junior year of high school at Detroit Edison Public School Academy Early College of Excellence and is a part of the National Honor Society. Adrian is in their second year of Mosaic Youth Theater of Detroit's tech program. Adrian has opened for Michigan Poet Laureate Nandi Comer.

In their free time, Adrian enjoys braiding hair, crocheting, and being with friends and family.

Honest Poem after Rudy Francisco

My birthday is September 14th, 2007, which makes me a Virgo.
My sister says I'm dumb and slow, which isn't true.
My friends say that I'm the happiest, gayest person that they know.
My family thinks I'm the sweetest, most perfect child.

My best friend says I'm  Sparkly and magical
which is definitely true.
My family calls me fat, has been calling me that for so long, I'm starting to believe their words equal truth.

I weigh 153 pounds
I have 1 half sister on my mom's side, and 3 half sisters and 2 half brothers on my dad's.
I have 4 nephews and no nieces.
I can swim.
I like all genders.

I eat all of my bullies and abuser's words and cry myself to sleep almost every night.
I tell people "I'm fine" but what I really mean is "Help, save me".
I tell people I'm straight when I'm actually pansexual and polyamorous.
I tell people my birth gender instead of telling them I'm ftm.

I have fears of the dark, spiders, being sick/vomiting, and losing all of the people I care about.
I recently lost my grandma and great grandma.
I recently opened up trauma I didn't realize I had.

My mom and sister are both homophobic and transphobic
They say they aren't.
I feel as if they think that I don't exist when they talk about it.

Sometimes
I wonder what my family and friends would say or do if they could see my thoughts.
I wonder if I was never here, would other people's lives change.
I wonder if my life would be different if I wasn't queer and neurodivergent.
I wonder what my life would be like if I was born male.

Sometimes
I fear that my fears will haunt me.
I fear that I'm the reason that someone is unhappy.
I fear that people are constantly talking about me behind my back.

Hi, My name is Adrian, but I also go by Arson.
I like musical theater,
creating set pieces,
stage managing,
Vocaloid,
K-pop (honestly any music that isn't in English-),
crocheting,
math,

reading, and
my partners.

My life is far from incredible, but I hope it gets better in the future.

Hurt.

I'm hurt.
But I'm told that it shouldn't

"It hurts me more than it hurts you"
"I'm doing this because I love you"
"Don't say I don't do anything for you"

All of this being said to me
harsh words said to me as I hide
from the scary person yelling
the person welding something so normal in her hands
So normal
yet it feels like a weapon

actually...
it is a weapon

She is a weapon

I call her mom
yet I don't feel like I should
I feel like she's not the person who gave birth to me

Instead what I feel
is pain
pain from the welts scattered on my delicate skin
pain from the horrible, harsh words thrown at me as if I'm nothing but trash

After being hit, smacked, and criticized for what feels like forever
over something I can't understand
because I'm still a young child

I sit in the corner
not as a timeout
not as a punishment

I cry from the pain
I cry from her
I cry from the exhaustion
I cry from them

"HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO TELL YOU TO STOP DOING DUMB SHIT"

What is dumb shit?
I have no idea between right and wrong
smart and dumb

I have no idea what I did to deserve this

I have no idea how the "real world" works

I have no idea what anything is

I know nothing because

I'm a child
your child

A child like a ceramic doll
A ceramic doll that you've broken into pieces that can never be fully put back together
pieces lost in the wind that can never be found

you did this
you broke your ceramic doll

didn't we tell you it's fragile?
not to break it?
To be careful with what you do?

"WHY DID YOU BREAK IT"

"IMSORRYPLEASEDONTTHURTME"

"OH, You're sorry all right."

"YOU DON'T LOVE ME"

my life flashes before my eyes
my eyes fill with tears as blood rushes to my skin
as I'm attacked by what's supposed to be in the closet
attacked by who's supposed to be my protector.

My "protector" isn't my protector
My "protector" is the reason I cry hoping for a new protector

A protector that doesn't attack me
A protector that helps me
A protector I can go to whenever I need it
A protector that can protect me from my "protector"

Grandma?
Are you there?
She did it again...
Can you fix it please?

Yes, she is my protector
She fixes my bruised and welted skin
Her hugs and kisses as delicate as my mind and body

She...
isn't here anymore

I have no protector

nobody to bandage the broken pieces
nobody to clean the blood sweat and tears from the pain
nobody there strong enough to protect me

I am hurt.
I have no protector
Only attackers

Living Letters

It all started with a letter
that I never knew would change my life for better
next came a book
that I never knew would hold me for 5 years

Held and carried me
for the hardest years of my life
Coddled
with a pen in hand
the book is always there for me

to catch my tears from heartbreak
to cure my boredom during class
to keep me alive
this book
these poems
saved my life

then, 11 years old
now, 16 years old

16 years tired of the repetition of a fucked up situation
turning into blood and meals dripping down the drain

16 years tired of the repetition of people taking my dignity and throwing it into the universe
light years from Earth

From school bullies giving me more insecurities than I can count

From people online taking and tainting something that was once rightfully mine too young for me to fully
remember

From two people who I used to consider as family ripping that same right from my grasp
entirely too recently for me to speak about

All of these occurrences
mentally damaging me for life
causing my pen and paper
to be mother and father to my unexplainable emotions
helping me create an answer
for the millions of unanswered questions, feelings, and thoughts
rattling in my head

always hidden from view
my writings
are all small parts of me
my happy
my sad
my anger
my traumas

my everything

my pen a slave to the hand I write with
because I will never stop writing

I can't stop living

Keeping myself alive for as long as I can hold a pen

I Never Knew

When I was younger
I never knew anything

From putting dish soap on the floor to "mop"
to not knowing that in Minecraft you have to smelt iron before you use it
(so much ore was wasted)

From not knowing that being hit for shit you didn't do isn't normal
to not knowing that if a person loves me, I shouldn't be forced to do sexual acts
(after I say I don't want to do them)

I...

I still don't know

Why--

I feel guilty for being hit
when I did nothing wrong
when we all know good and goddamn well who the culprit is?

Why do I--

fear the touch I crave?
feel like everyone I see will take advantage of me the first chance they get?
flinch every time someone touches or taps me unexpectedly?

Why do I doubt my friends and family?
Constantly assuming that every relationship is as much of a fuck up as the last
forever cursing me

my mind plagued with a sense of disbelief
that everyone I meet will make me feel as if
my happiness
my ability to say "no"
my right to be treated properly
isn't an option

My heart is cursed to believe
That as long as these demented memories and evils reside in my head
that love is pain

love is constantly having bruises painful to the touch
love is not being heard
love is being seen when they think it's necessary
love is not being able to tell the difference between what I want and what they "need"
love is having to do everything for myself no matter if I can or can't do it

This is what I thought – think – love is
because of these people who *love me...*

that love is supposed to be a nightmare
that my decision doesn't matter
that I'm always guilty, even when I'm not
that I'm supposed to fear what I desire
that I deserve to be taken advantage of
that everyone should be allowed to touch me no matter if I object

that nobody will truly ever love me...

So remember
if I act out of line

I don't know anything.

Robbed

There has been a robbery
A child at 9 years old
having something taken away
that she--I mean HE so desperately wanted--needed

reports say that this poor boy (?) has been suffering for years without a way out
The victim states that there was paint
colored deep red
where the robber attacked and...
lingered?

Years later, this tragic story continues where the...child is attacked
by the same robber
leaving heavy cups filled with empty calories
shattered glasses with a high pitched voice
lingering where the kid screamed

months have passed and the tragic story of the now 16 year old continues
the child...reports himself
as the robber?
the child robbed himself?

After surveying each and every crime scene
we can conclude that it wasn't the boy
but his body that betrayed him.

Through camera footage we can see how the events displayed before our eyes
Painting walls red when upset or angered
punching the pits of his stomach whenever he was done painting
filling cup after cup, his body weighed down his chest
screams from how her--his body betrayed him
screams shattering all glasses around him.

Voice lingering...
because it just happened.



Charisma Holly

Charisma Holly is a sixteen-year-old youth poet and spoken word artist from Detroit. She attends the Detroit Edison Public School Academy Early College of Excellence and has been affiliated with InsideOut Literary Arts for several years. She has been a member of InsideOut's CityWide Poets after school program and InsideOut's 2023 Youth Performance Troupe. Charisma has had the prestigious honor of speaking at the Uniroyal Promenade Park Dedication alongside Mayor Mike Duggan, as well as opening for the Michigan Poet Laureate Nandi Comer. Charisma writes to bring hope and inspiration to other aspiring youth and shine a bright light in the world around her.

Losing Things

Ever since I was young, my mother has told me I have a tendency to lose things,
So I've started trying to keep track.

I remember in second grade it was a little pink hat;
Don't remember what happened to that.

At 15, it was a purse
And losing something so valuable...it doesn't get much worse

See, value is in our ability to see it.
My parents used to tell me, "If you really valued that item, you wouldn't leave it,"

And while I don't necessarily disagree with the philosophy,
I feel like it's more out of tendency.

I tend to lose my things out of habit
Because, if I had thought about it, I would have grabbed it.

I would have grabbed my phone,
My phone,
My phone!

I would have grabbed my phone and returned that missed call.
See, I lost track of time in the midst of it all.

Actually, I think I forgot to keep the sink locked,
Or forgot to turn the door off.

It seems I'm losing my memory;
Don't wanna lose you from my memory.

I remember my grandma got me a little pink hat in second grade;
A purse when I was fifteen.
The same day I lost my phone,
Was the same day she tried to call me.
I have a tendency to lose things.

So when I lost my grandmother,
I seemed to be losing the memories.

Images fleeting too fast for me to catch.
It was thing after thing; this after that.

I started to lose the salt from my eyes
After the repetition of 'why' after 'why' after 'why.'

I lost my 'why'

And my 'z'
And my 'a'

And my 'b'
And my 'c'

And my 'k'
Which is to say
I lost the letters she gave me for Christmas
The one where my name is spelled wrong on the envelope.

She forgot it started with a 'C'
And it felt like I lost part of my identity.

It felt like I lost part of me.
Because how could she leave so unexpectedly? Was it her value that I didn't see?

See, I've started to lose track of day and night,
Because how can you relax in the sunshine if you're constantly dressed in all black?

I've started to lose track of the five stages of grief,
And almost lost track of my belief

That she would still be watching over me.
But even as I started to lose bit and piece,

I held onto this thing called love;
Kept it in my pocket so I wouldn't forget.

I couldn't forget
Oreo milkshakes,
And potato skins,
And family board games;

Memories that I can't afford to lose,
And somehow, it's as if I started to lose my self doubt.

The more I hold onto this love,
The more it seems I lose my insecurities, and pick up self esteem.

The more memories I keep track,
The more I lose this weight on my back.

I lost my fear of the past. I learned to lose the broken pieces
And build a stronger sense of me.

You see, I have a tendency to lose things,
And find myself in the process.

Not A Poem

Irony (n) ironic (adj)

1. my doctor falling ill and not being able to afford his medicine
2. not being there to claim your perfect attendance award
3. only being able to remember one childhood nickname: The Forgetter

EXAMPLE: *I would take a bullet for you / When you're the one holding the gun.*

Andy's Attic

My favorite Pixar movie is Toy Story 3;
A little reminder that you've got a friend in me.
Late nights bundled in my blanket, my brother in his,
Watching the toys try not to end up in someone else's attic.

I know how that is:
Air mattress,
And a couple of covers.
Carrying what I can in one backpack:
Extra clothes and snacks
And photographs
And whatever other who's it's
and what's it's
and gadgets
and gizmos
will get me through the night.

I know what it's like feeling like there's nowhere else to go,
Whirled up in a tornado
Trying to tap my shoes three times
And wake up home,

Wherever that is.

Asking strangers and smiling cats for directions
As if they could ever really understand.

They don't know what it's like
To not have a roof over my head,
But always have walls built up around me.

They don't feel the pressure of building a house of cards and trying to keep everything from collapsing

They don't have to grow up as fast as a lost girl who never lives in NeverLand

I never know how to respond when they ask "When will you be going home?"

I don't know...

They say things like:
"Oh, you forgot to put your address on the application."
"What's your address? Say it correctly."

And my teacher tells me,
"You don't have to go home,
But you can't stay here."

But where do you stay when you can't stay in the same place?

Constantly dragging your baggage to house after house

Jumping through rabbit holes
And wandering down yellow brick roads
To a place where every tale has a happy ending

Except for your own

As if my mind could take me to a whole new world
Through Candy Crush and Sugar Rush to ask Felix to fix it
Across the Atlantic and sail the Pacific so someone can find Nemo and Dory
Through every possible book, movie, series, and story,

But never home.

When imagination and cardboard are not enough to build a house of gold;
Or a house of gumballs;
Or a house of glass;
Or anything at all,

Where do I go?

A public park? The one with a tire swing
Take a storybook or two to read,
Find love in the blanket I sit on beneath a tree
As I Google the lyrics
To remind my sister

That she will always find a friend in me.

One day, we will watch our favorite childhood movies in a living room
On a big TV.

For now, I'll tell her to hold onto her dreams;

That wherever our story goes,
Together,
We'll make it home.

You Are Not The Sun

Let me tell me something about myself:
You are not the sun.

You won't burn your eyes by glancing at your own reflection.
The universe will not melt over one imperfection.
You do not have to supernova every time you do some introspection.

You
Are not the sun.

You are not at the center of the solar system.
You can think you are the biggest and brightest,
But when the sky is at its bluest and widest,
It will be clear that you are not the limit.
You don't have to count your revolutions per minute.

You
Are not

The sun.

You don't have to rise above the whole world just to feel strong.
You don't have to burn off billions from the break of dawn.

No one's wings will melt just because you let them close.
You do not have to stay 94 million miles away from the people you love most.
You do not have to paint yourself pink and yellow just to be a sunrise.

You are

Not

The sun.

You can spread your leaves;
Let your heart be lightweight as you spread your wings.

You are someone who pushes and pulls;
You are someone who changes and grows;
You are someone who is able to fly.

You do not have to rise above the whole world just to find your corner of the sky.

You are not the sun.

You can just be

You.

All You Have To Lose

You say you love me most when you're least afraid to lose me,
But if walking away couldn't make you cry,

If you already know you would be alright,
If you know that this isn't worth the fight,

Can you really say you love me
If you're not afraid to lose me?

If you're going to love me,

Love me like I'm a bandaid
Like pulling away would make you bleed.

Look at me like I'm the light of your world
Break me, and you won't be able to see,

Raise me like I'm a tall glass of water
Because if you don't hold me carefully I just might spill

Love me like I'm the key to Heaven
Because I might just be the key to Heaven

If you're going to love me,

Love me like your last \$5 dollars at Greektown
Or like car keys
Something you can lose but pray you never do

If you're going to love me,

Love me like eternity
like you want it to last forever cause

If you need something quick, fall in love with hookups,
Something disposable, love plastic cups
If you want something easy to blow away, you can love leaves

But if you're going to love me,

Hold me with hands that tremble at the thought of dropping me.
Hug me so close I can feel your heart beat rapidly
At the idea of ever letting go.

This love will be a dream that blocks out your nightmares of falling off cloud 9.
I want Monopoly over your mind,
And even if your next roll isn't enough to make it past Go,
you can always land on my train station and
Conduct your electricity to mine;
Connect even if the hairs on the back of your neck warn you that things can get shocking,

Breathe with me.
Even if your lungs take in the smoke of the fire that we spark,
Breathe with me.

I want you to love me like you know you can lose me,
But you never plan on letting go.

Love me with everything you've got to lose.



Hazel Griffin

Hazel Griffin is a member of the 2023 InsideOut Youth Performance Troupe.

Games

Love is a game.
In this game you always lose.
No matter how many cheat codes you have,
you still lose.
Nobody's a winner,
because at the end you'll both get hurt eventually.

There are no rules.
Nothing is off limits.
It's a dangerous game to play.
Yet we do it constantly,
knowing the consequences.

But let's play.
Try and keep up.

You're at START.
You found someone to spend your time thinking about.

Move 5 spaces forward.

You let that person in.
They become your everything.
You become their everything.

The game starts to get confusing –
Because one of you stops.

Move 3 spaces forward.

You start to rely on them
Trust them.
You've let your guard down.

Move 2 spaces
after you say those 3 magic words

I l-l-l-l-l-ov.....

I can't say it.
It hurts too much.
Those words make you different.
Change your whole dynamic.
It corrupts you.

Move 1 space back.

Those smiles on your faces
turn into screams lightning up the room.

It's not the same love.
You overthink everything you do.
You overturn every stone,
but it will never quell the worry in your
heart.

Move 8 spaces back.

You're almost back at start.

That love isn't the same anymore.
You know it.
You're stuck at this space.

Roll the dice to determine your fate.
See if you'll move 1 space forward to continue
or one space back to end the game.

What will you roll?

My People (after Lucille Clifton)

Come celebrate with me that everyday something has tried to kill me but failed.
The white-colored waters, trying to drown me with their prejudice and privilege.
The everlasting darkness waving over me trying to drag me from the light to the dark.

Come celebrate with me,
while I fight off all the stereotypes that tell me
I'm gonna be 16 with a kid on my hip with no degree.
If this is the fee black girls have to pay,
then I guess I have no currency.
That tape around my mouth tryna silence me,
silence and cancel my blackness.
But when will they learn my melanin is not something to be silenced or weaponized.

Everyday something tries to kill me.
Destroy me.
Bury me.
Deceive me.
Yet I stand tall.
Not forgetting who I'm standing on.
Standing on the bones
of slaves, the Native Americans,
the speakers of justice and anyone who let a colored into their home, knowing it would be their last guest.

But this world has failed.
Failed at putting us down.
My people get stronger by the day.
Fighting for the ones that couldn't be here today.
Forever pushing this fight on and on again
Til we finally get our restitution.

Perfection

Daddy's girl –
Something that they expect.

Daddy's little girl –
something I used to be.

The expectations of society are weighing me down.
As a girl, I feel unprepared for
the weight of perfection.

I'm not allowed to talk or have a brain
unless it's connected to a man's.

My mouth is taped shut
and when I am allowed to speak,
it is required that I'm quiet and calm.

As I sit in my short skirt
proud of my perfectly shaven smooth calves,
it is implied that I want to be touched;

that I want attention;
that I want your fingers down my panties.

The weight of perfection declares
that if I'm too nice to you
and leave you unsatisfied

then I must have teased you
and I must never leave you wanting more.

Why must I hold my tongue?
Just cut it off.
Then I'll be perfect.

Take out my brain.
Then I'll be perfect.

Dress me up.
Then I'll be perfect.

Just toss me in a shed
and throw away the key.

It'll be like I never existed...
A forgotten memory.
Sheer perfection.

Wish

Wishes –
We all make them.
Mine are not so simple, though.

I wish I could *not* feel.
Maybe my cuts wouldn't hurt so much.
They lay on my wrist
Stuck.

I wish I couldn't feel.
Maybe my burns wouldn't hurt.
They stain my thighs –
are embedded in me.

I wish I didn't love so hard.
Maybe I'd forget about you.

I wish I wasn't so insecure.
Maybe I could wear jeans again.
They are like mirror where everyone
can see how fragile and skinny my body is.
I wish I wasn't.

I wish I could stop overeating.
I stuff my face until I'm sick
trying to gain just one pound.

I wish I didn't have to fake my smile.
Maybe I could tell people I'm not ok.
But then they'll treat you like you'll break at any second.

Maybe I could be happy.
But no one ever is.

I wish I didn't worry about others –
or worrying about disappointing them,
But that look they give you
that lets you know you've broken their heart...
that they don't see you the same...
I wish I could unsee it.

I wish...
I wish I could be me again.

Too bad wishes don't come true.

Hazel Speaks of Rivers (after Langston Hughes)

The river speaks tales
Tall tales
Stories
Truths
Lies
But not its own
It speaks from other's lives
And today it spoke of mine
The river speaks of my child years
It saw my face in belle isle trying to dip my tiny feet into the water
It spoke of the tiny rocks I kept in my pocket as a kid
Laughing in my own world of a everlasting child wonder
Little did the river know it would plunder
Eating greasy pizza that would stain my pants
Waiting for the sun to show me my new story for the next day
The river speaks of my preteen years
It saw my face in the bathtub
It couldn't figure out why I was there
But it caught my tears
And they told them everything
It spoke of the times where I wanted to fit in
Just dying for something real
Where I could be me
And not have been asked to leave
Having a circle of friends
But couldn't get pass the circular line to enter
The time where I could feel people slipping away into a different atmosphere
While I'm still in my plastic bubble
The river spoke once more
It spoke of my teen years which aren't finished
It spoke of when my face was in a toilet
It could see the guilt on my face throwing up all my regrets and sorrows
It saw me again in the running sink water
Flushing my happy pills down the drain
Because it didn't make me happy anymore
It had been a while since it saw me happy
The last thing the river told me
Was that out of all those years
I became a different person through each one
And there's still more to come
It told me that the past made me who I am
And the future to become
Has just begun



Ingrid Ramos-Aranda

Ingrid is a Mexican Southwest Detroit-based poet and is a senior at Cass Technical High School. She uses poetry as an outlet to talk about the struggles and unspoken trauma in her community. Ingrid hopes to express her true emotions without feeling the need to satisfy an audience. She likes to give back to her community by interning at an afterschool center as a keyboard teacher to kids in 1st -8th grade. She can't wait to explore the world around her once she graduates.

I Can't Exist AKA Immigration and Customs Enforcement

Day one of being born as a Mexican
you get taught how to read three letters
Three measly letters don't seem like a lot
But these letters took my neighbors, my friends, my family for decades

You get taught to fear them
When they're around make sure you stand straight
Don't get too close or they'll be able to smell the quesadilla you had for breakfast

Make sure you have your American shoes on when you leave the house
With your American shirt and your American smile
Don't forget the American voice –
Cause a sliver of anything else will have your family apart

ICE already took
my best friend's father, made them leave it all behind
Ice took away
my uncle who was my only father-figure in life
He left his whole family in the US
ICE waited outside my mother's job
but she never came out

Cause when you're born a Mexican
you get taught the sounds of the tire coming to a halt
The sound of their boots stomping around
You don't hear the pangs of *their* heartbeat
All you hear is the ringing in your own ears

So,
I must disguise myself whenever I leave the house

Wearing my American shoes
with my American shirt
with my American smile
and my American voice

So that I-C-E
Will let me live my life

My Mouth Tastes Of A Language

that sits at the tip of my tongue...
it's starting to fade
Being a kid,
the only thing I knew
was Español
watching Dora and dubbed over Spongebob
talking to my family in Español
I had no reason to learn English
when my entire world was Español

When I went to kindergarten
Spanish wasn't allowed
so my tongue was cut off
and one of English was sewed on
Over the years,
it healed
and grew attached to me

Losing my native tongue
led to empty spaces between
me and my grandmother
our chairs moved miles apart

A man who looked like my father
needed help with translating
but my tongue
doesn't know what direction to fold in

My ears have never gone, though
Their ability to understand a language
that my mouth cannot connect to
is a curse
I say sorry to the man

I don't say sorry to the man
I do not see a man
that reminds me of my father
I sit with my grandma
only a few feet apart
An English tongue is not sewed on

My tongue is not severed off
I don't go to kindergarten
I do not watch tv
I am never a kid

I am not born
My mother doesn't fly to the US

Actually, what happens is

my great-great-great grandmother
teaches her children
the recipes
for Enchiladas and
Tamales,
and Arroz con Leche
and she writes it all down

And en Español
she tells them
“Mija Necesitas a predate
como a cocinar para tus hijos
para no se olvidar la cultura”
(You need to learn to cook for your kids, so they don't forget their culture)

Remix it:
My most tasteful
and familiar language
will never be diluted
Because it stays inside of me
In my arms,
my legs,
my hair,
my eyes

If you try to kill us off
it will always lie in our soul

Remix + feature:

Don't fuck with me and my people.

Daughter To Mother, To What Daughter Thinks A Mother Ought To Be

Mother is the ocean and its breeze

The shore
The sand and all its little rocks

The sea creatures
that crawl along
Mother is the sun too

Daughter loves the night
Likes the rain
when it pitters onto her cheek
in gentle little splats

Rain sends whispers of thunders
that bring so much comfort

The sun rises
and blinds daughter

Daughter hates the morning

Daughter has to run to shore
Daughter must open the deep sea
to look for mother
Cause mother is never home for her

When daughter cries into the ocean
it just melts
into the salty sea
Mother is used to the salt of the sea
But daughter's eyes just get redder

The waves push daughter out
onto the shards and rocks

Daughter looks at a woman
who is the ocean
and its breeze
The shore
The sand and all its little rocks
The sea creatures
that crawl along

A woman who is the sun too

A woman who can give no more
not even to one she can call her
own Daughter
must fend off this world

on her own

Daughter does not want to be alone
Daughter can scream
'til her voice goes hoarse
But how can daughter expect
some water that's mostly salt
to make sure she's not parched?

Daughter wants to believe
the ocean
will be a place of tranquility again
just like when she was young
when naivety brought bliss
from the terrors of the deep sea
Daughter cries "Mom please."

The sea resides
The sun sets
and doesn't return Daughter waits

Daughter decides to build a boat
She cannot swim

Daughter gives up
She cannot swim

Daughter looks for a life vest
She cannot swim

Daughter gives up and jumps in

She cannot swim.

Babies Cry In Church For A Reason

They hope that their wails
are loud enough
to be heard by
the glass
and it'll shatter,
the tainted shards
will decorate the floor

People are not born
good nor evil
with empathy
or anger

People are not born.

They are made –
created and molded
by wet clay

that parents desperately
shove into ovens
but it'll never dry

You can never
force a child
to conform

No amount of threats
can create cement

It's not rebelling
if this is just
who I AM

I will not abide
to make myself
more digestible
to your taste

I will continue
to live without any regret

You cannot silence
my wails
with a pacifier
or tape
or nails

I will not get onto my knees
and hope for myself to change

I am me.

I am Ingrid.

I am something.

I am nothing.

I will be who I say I will be.

I am who I am.

And no amount of your pleas
will stop me.

Ingrid Speaks of Rivers

The river floods our city
to remind us about her existence

To remind us that she stayed put
as people were moved out.

The river created a haven,
allowing us to reflect upon
who we are
and *were*

Our dark clouds floated away,
being tossed
by the winds that are created
from the crashes of the waves

It was slow
It was gradual
But they are gone.

The river envies me
I can't exactly
pinpoint what happened yesterday
or the day before
and she wishes
She could forget
all the pains that have sunken
into her

She wants to absorb all of humanity
Maybe then
she could grow
to understand it all.



Kya Mills

Kya Mills is a Redford-based poet attending Lee M. Thurston Senior High School. Her poems are mainly about things that go on in her daily life. She has performed at The School At Marygrove for Teen Hype and The 2nd Annual If The River Could Sing event. She has been interviewed by the Metro Times, and has had opportunities to open for prestigious poets such as Nandi Comer, Michigan's Poet Laureate. Outside of poetry, she is a member of the National Honor Society, plans to go to Ohio University for either English or journalism and likes playing video games, traveling, playing basketball, cooking, her yearbook class, trying new food and writing in general.

Brent's Poem

You didn't come around a lot, but you always had a little money for me every now and then for Christmas.

You said Kirk Franklin ruined gospel music. Taking away the soulful organs and generational pastors everyone knew and loved.

You never got to hear my poetry. I know you wouldn't have made me perform in front of family, but they would've insisted the millisecond you told them. You would've apologized for that.

You'll never see me graduate.

You and my mom and her cousins (practically a brother and a sister and brother passed away) all grew up together. Constantly.

Printing press together. Walking trails together. You and Her and Her and Him and Him. Forever and ever.

Me and maybe coach cousin and maybe lawyer cousin and maybe pastor cousin and maybe cybersecurity cousin and maybe cousins I don't even know – you could've reconnected us.

I know you aren't to blame for this.

You weren't a burden.

You weren't a burden.

You were NOT a burden.

We enjoyed your company.

There are two rundown houses waiting for you in my neighborhood. One to live in and one to sell and get a little money.

You could've chauffeured me around – giving my uncle a rest (although he insists he doesn't mind).

You could've called someone – they just changed the number.

You did call some *thing*
and a gun answered.

Petersons

My standards for college are too high.
I don't consider D3 of any sort.
The school can't be in Texas, Florida, California or New York.
And if everyone's accepted, almost everyone should graduate.
College is expensive, but I can go wherever I want with scholarships.
Let's look for some.
It can't be too hard.

Here's one: Write about how the 3 Ds being obsolete has affected the indictment of Donald Trump, or about how the invention of plastic cups contributed to the industrial revolution. Minimum words 9,999. Maximum words 10,000.

Okay, not a fan of the writing.

For a whopping 400 dollars, you can do the turbo hustle and cha-cha slide at the same time in 14-inch pink stilettos. We can make an exception for red, but you'll lose half your award if you win. It can't just be any shade of red, either.

Rose red.

Red pen crossing out dead scholarships
or "I might be going to the safe choice school after all" red.

This scholarship is offering 20,000 dollars! All you have to do is submit an essay, 3 letters of recommendation, your social security number, a Big Five assessment, a DNA test, a blood test, proof that you have broken into Fort Knox, your grandma's tax documents...okay, moving on.

www.applebottomjeans.com doesn't do scholarships anymore, they stopped 5 years ago. Damn.

Hmm...for this scholarship, you can do whatever you want.
GPA, ACT, SAT, nothing at all.
BUT you must go to St. Johnny Bootleg University in Wyoming.
Yes. We know they aren't on your list.
The building hasn't been updated since 1856.
And if you look closely,
you can see the handprints of manifest destiny colonizers on the walls.
They have no sports, except pineapple pickle pork belly ball.
Instead of a racket, you use a pineapple to hit a pickle
while tiptoeing on strips of bacon on the ground.

They only have one student: YOU.
Yes, YOU.
You will go to St. Johnny Bootleg
because you're too broke to go anywhere else.
You will see the handprints.
You WILL play pineapple pickle pork belly ball and YOU WILL LIKE IT!

So WHY haven't you been looking for any scholarships?

Young, Gifted and Black

I am Young, Gifted and Black.
Am I actually young though?
I am closer to being 20 than 10.
Closer to a Nissan than a Barbie Dream Car.
So, what does that mean for me?

I am gifted and black.
But am I really gifted though?
I was told I was a rainbow fish and
they don't see scales like mine too often.
But there are tons of other rainbow fish.
Fish who chose the hardest books to read.
Fish who were stopped on state tests because they were going too fast.
Fish who were doing multiplication on Reflex Math
when everyone else was barely finished with subtraction.
Clearly there are more fish in the sea than me.
My scales aren't a rainbow rarity.

I am black.
But am I though?
My blackness has been questioned.
My age has been questioned.
My humanity has been questioned.
With all the "Girl, who is your mama?" "Why do you sound like that?" "You sound like a robot." "You talk so proper – and why do you talk like that? I'm begging you. Stop. It's driving me crazy." "You sound like a little white girl." You sound like an adult...and I wasn't expecting you to sound like that."

Because Black girls don't read.
Black girls don't write.
Black girls aren't academically smart.
Black girls don't enunciate,
and black girls don't want to go to college.

We don't know WHAT black girls want to do but it's not *that*!
We can't hear the black girls tell us what they want to do
because we're too busy talking over them.
Talking for them.
We've been doing it since "mammie"
and we'll keep doing it with "thot".

I am young, gifted and black.
Am I?

November 2nd

I think when it happened, the first thing I saw was a room full of people.
Talking, laughing, they all seemed like they were having fun.
Except one of them.
She looked scared for me.
I wondered why.

Being swung through the air,
I realized for the first time that I was looking down...not forward.
I learned that I was dressed in a dotted green scarf,
and I saw a brown bowler cap drop to the ground.
The person holding my head and ears like a medal
had checkered shoes and seemed...happy.
But how could you be happy
when my fluff is falling out of my torso and my head?

This isn't a bedroom
or a carnival.
It might be a factory
where the metal rips my dotted green scarf.
Don't factories have spilled milk cartons?
Half-eaten food?
Empty Taki bags?

This new land
with its ripped shirts and
the smell of gas
is called home by winged creatures.

These creatures don't have arms
but they call,
they fly,
and they eat the Doritos that replaced my stitching.

They lay their eggs
that will hatch their babies in my open stomach,
my fluff giving them warmth through the cold.

I've seen way more of me
than I ever wanted to see.

Kya Speaks of Rivers (after Langston Hughes)

The river and I are barely acquaintances.
It winks at me on the street going to my grandma's.
Waves to parked cars visiting the Nature Center.
It's feelings aren't hurt,
it knows I'll be coming back

The river sings of welcomes across the Ambassador Bridge.
The blue of it all cloaking me in a cap and gown;
crashing against Windsor for this graduation ceremony.

It's waves are a symphony
Not for utopia,
but for better.

Gratitude

The 2023 InsideOut Youth Performance Troupe would like to thank Suma Rosen, Michelle Bolofer, Justin Rogers and the entire InsideOut Literary Arts staff, writers, sponsors, and donors for making this year's Troupe a huge success. We also extend our deepest gratitude for all of the guest writers who touched our lives and our digital workshops during this hybrid season.

We are bravely holding the line for every youth artist who comes after us as we forge ever forward.