



NATIONAL
STUDENT
POETS
PROGRAM

2020

THE NATION'S HIGHEST HONOR
FOR YOUTH POETS PRESENTING
ORIGINAL WORK

About the National Student Poets Program

The Institute of Museum and Library Services and the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers partner to present the National Student Poets Program (NSPP), the country's highest honor for youth poets presenting original work. Five outstanding high school poets whose work exhibits exceptional creativity, dedication to craft, and promise are selected annually for a year of service as national poetry ambassadors.

National Student Poets are chosen from among the National Medalists in the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards with input from a jury of literary luminaries and leaders in education and the arts. The Poets receive academic awards and opportunities to present their work at writing and poetry events during their year of service. They develop and lead community-focused projects for a wide range of audiences in underserved communities throughout their regions. National Student Poets Program Alumni remain connected to the Program, often continuing their community projects after their terms have concluded, and mentor each incoming class.

The National Student Poets Program is supported by funds from the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

artandwriting.org/NSPP

facebook.com/NationalStudentPoetsProgram

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Eligibility

Letter from the Program Partners

We are honored to introduce these five gifted young writers, appointed as the 2020 National Student Poets, the nation's highest honor for youth poets presenting original work. Through the National Student Poets Program, we identify teen poets with unique perspectives and powerful voices, invest in training and mentoring them, and launch them on a year of service.

We find ourselves at an unprecedented moment in time, one in which a global pandemic has upended daily life and made us rethink what it means to connect with one another. We're reminded that the literary arts, and poetry in particular, have the power to articulate shared experiences that transcend the limitations of physical distance. The Class of 2020 will serve as ambassadors for poetry at a time when readings, workshops, festivals, and events have been suddenly, necessarily transformed. The landscape of their service may look different than in past years, but their bold, fresh voices show new ways forward, and we cannot wait to see how they engage communities in person and virtually in the year ahead.

Many of the readings and workshops that these talented students present will be organized in partnership with museums and libraries, those essential community spaces that motivate, educate, and comfort us. These spaces are the spirit of our nation, inspiring curiosity and new visions of our collective future.

We hope you enjoy the work in this volume. Share it with friends, family, and strangers. Let this collection find a home on your shelves, where you can come across it and experience the moments of reflection and focus that poetry offers us. We think you'll find, as we did, that these talented teens provide hope for the future of the arts, writing, and literacy. Together, we celebrate the enduring legacy of American poetry, and we welcome these young writers as the 2020 Class of National Student Poets.



Crosby Kemper

Director

Institute of Museum and Library Services



Christopher Wisniewski

Executive Director

Alliance for Young Artists & Writers

Past Jurors

Kaveh Akbar
Kwame Alexander
Esther Belin
Robert Casper
Cortney Lamar Charleston
Billy Collins
Michael Earl Craig
Mayda Del Valle
Toi Derricotte
Martin Jude Farawell
Carolyn Forché
Carrie Fountain
Andrea Gibson
Diana Goetsch
Kimiko Hahn
Joy Harjo
Terrance Hayes
Ilya Kaminsky
Rickey Laurentiis
Al Letson
Robin Coste Lewis
David Lynn
Adrian Matejka
January Gill O'Neil
Alice Quinn
Glenis Redmond
Roger Reeves
Naomi Shihab Nye
Nicole Sealey
Brenda Shaughnessy
Patricia Smith
Rose Styron
Jeff Tweedy
Kerry Washington
Damian Woetzel
Alfre Woodard
Jacqueline Woodson

Class of 2020 Jurors

Jennifer Benka*, President and Executive Director of the Academy of American Poets.

Tina Chang, Brooklyn Poet Laureate.

Juan Felipe Herrera*, 21st U.S. Poet Laureate.

Edward Hirsch*, poet and President of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.

Cyndee Landrum, Institute of Museum and Library Services' Deputy Director, Office of Library Services.

Shane McCrae, award-winning poet.

Danez Smith, winner of the Kate Tufts Discovery Award and the Lambda Literary Award for Gay Poetry.

Arthur Sze, former Guggenheim Fellow and two-time National Endowment for the Arts Fellow.

Crystal Valentine, former New York City Youth Poet Laureate.

Javier Zamora, award-winning poet and activist.

* Indicates a repeat juror



Maddy Dietz
Saint Paul, MN
Midwest Region

Maddy Dietz is a 17-year-old, Shakespeare-performing lesbian author from Saint Paul, Minnesota. She is an award-winning poet and an alumna of the Alpha Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror Workshop for Young Writers, with work published in Parsec Ink's *Triangulation: Dark Skies* anthology. Maddy founded two Press Corps for Girl Scouts councils, in Minnesota and in her former home of central Texas, to give girls more opportunities to explore and use their voices by creating original media. Passionate about providing children with the kind of opportunities she desired, she has also developed and led numerous poetry- and prose-writing workshops for elementary school-aged students. These materials are being expanded into free kits for nonprofit organizations and afterschool programs. An award-winning debater, Maddy has served as the guest host on multiple episodes of *Smash Boom Best*, Minnesota Public Radio's debate podcast for children. ■

violet apocalypse

she held out the peach she'd kept in her pocket and i crowed
my yeses and yeses and a dozen times yes
(we don't get thousands anymore
we don't get hundreds),
both were bruised, both were warm
and overdue.

we ate the flesh of it together.
teeth sank into the rustsweet of overripe
fruits of yesterday;
one of the last not confined in a can.
our fingers slick and sticky with yellow syrup
clasped around each other over the fuzz.

salt and peach do not mix well.
so i held the crying until the last strands
of red were picked away, more bitter
from cyanide than from missing it already,
and i kissed the wooden heart of the fruit
as softly as i could.

we set it by the almost window to dry.
watched as the storm outside raged,
nuclear heat warmed our concrete walls and the last
remaining roaches still slipping
through the cracks of extinction
taptapped at the window for a taste.

on the fourth day i held the pit to test.
cross-legged on floor fingers clawed tight
around my wedding cake grinding it into
dust

into the rough of the ground.
hour on tuesday three on wednesday six on
sunday, to poke my finger through

our engagement, that pretty little ring.
big enough for either one of us;
i wear it on my thumb and she
wears it on her index finger.
we trade every other day
we set it by our pillow at night like the baby
we cannot have.

nature : nurture :: circumstance : habit

i compose essays,
chicago citations,
detailing how we all arrive from
somewhere outside of ourselves.

twelve sentence paragraphs
of upbringing, childhood,
and whether or not
there was fluoride in the tap water
and lead in the paint,
if the kings of their castles threw bread
at ducks or at children
and what that did to the haughty prince.

yet, i still hold fast
to the glossy belief
that i won't grow
the direction my own pruned branches
demand.

Companions; a date to and from the history museum

yeah i heard the voice of god and what about it.
they sounded like subway announcements all
waves of pull and no comprehension
no motion in it
no point in straining to hear
when you know which direction the earth's spinning already.

old-with-an-e.
parchment of before makes me
wanna breathe steadier.
same as seeing the little clay dolls
and milk bottles
daisy stem spouts so the infant may
live another week.

how cruel,
to look for 12 seconds
what someone cherished their entire life.
but i wonder
if they breathed
easier than i.

i don't trust subway god but
i've been saying little prayers
to the dead that i see.

to the mouse who jumped
onto the train track
and the fragile baby rattle behind glass,
to animals and minerals of every kingdom, including mine.



Manasi Garg
Saratoga, CA
West Region

Manasi Garg is a rising senior at Saratoga High School. For her, poetry is a way to translate trauma into meaning, to breathe life into untold stories and unspeakable thoughts. Her first poem, if you could call it that, was a wannabe Taylor Swift song about her deep heartbreak over a nonexistent boy. Now, Manasi prefers R&B / neo-soul / funk music—oh, and much of her work explores immigration, ancestry, and girlhood, all peppered with quintessential teenage angst and identity crises. She often finds herself writing about her family, her experience as a second-generation Indian American girl, and the stories of her people, mostly because they are all she really knows about. You can find her work in *The Kenyon Review*, *The Mercury News*, and her family WhatsApp chat. Manasi also works as editor-in-chief for her high school's award-winning newspaper, *The Saratoga Falcon*. ■

Cutglass

Originally published in the *Kenyon Review*

Mama tells me there are men who measure themselves by the shadows they cast. In the war years they ripped softness from

the earth like bread and held it in their teeth. I was not to be baptized in the blackened throat of a rifle. This is how

to leave home: in the underbelly of a truck with three teeth bared and passport shredded under tongue. Well, I suppose

it is a story well known. Boats break upon banks and suture bodies onto the shore. We are so tired of anthems

and children's things. I am trying to weep for the rubber factory and the boy I kissed behind it, trying to

remember what it felt like to deliver my baby sister in the bedroom beside the mango grove. What it felt like to bear the weight of another

heart: Cavernous, like thumbing through a photo album of the dead grandmother you never listened to. Oh Mama, memory will always

load the gun, and morning will find us scattered into lace. There are men who excavate graveyards from white skies and hold their

children as they would a gun. We will take this new country and wear it like a coat.

1991

My father in the picture is not
someone I can name, untouched by time he
steams in his own glory. Cocooned in oyster's pearl and
smile cracking his oil dark skin, my father in the picture is the
kind of man to eat unwashed fruit directly from
the ground, the kind of man to throw a lit firecracker into the open
window of his neighbor. Dangerous, he says, I was
dangerous, dangerous, I ask, this thick haired, fish eyed boy?
Yes, my father in the picture says. Dangerous the way
young men with no bodies to surrender are, the way men
who keep their life's savings in glass jars and call their
mothers every day are. Dangerous the way men who
fantasize about running away from home with nothing but a
rifle and a book are, what good are water or a compass, my father
asks, if I already have what I need to survive? Each year
behind him blowing like bed linens in the hot Indian wind, so
utterly important. Even from here I can see it in his eyes.
The camera pins him down and I dissect him like it's
biology class, put a scalpel to his skull and peel: blood curdling on
his face like a lineage haunted by God's outstretched fingers.
I can hear the heady riots frothing in his veins, touch the
spine curved: two hands cupped together, ready to
scavenge for the rain and its milky halo, for the red Delhi moon
rippling like a lily pad, for anything at all.
My father in the picture is still so young, he has not yet
learnt how beautiful he is. He does not know
he is beautiful the way all young men are beautiful: the glint
of light on the edge of a blade. A prayer forged from blackened steel,
ready for the unbecoming.

Everything We Left Behind

In my dreams, my grandmother and I are
bodies of fat and light and we clasp our hands so
tightly that even God knows to cry. I am in love
with her and her marbled flesh. We walk through her first home.
Cursed city. I watch her shed the years, watch them whisper into the clouds
like linens drying under the hot sun. Here is her house that burned down.
Here is the temple next to the fruit orchard. Here is where the
neighbors threw rocks. She was only 11 when
the world ended. Pakistan, 1947. She tells me the men would rather
drown their daughters than let them be taken.
I picture a thousand Ophelias: the white dresses billowing,
the river water scything their breathless skin in rivulets, their heads
bobbing up and down Ravi River like a string of pearls.
I wonder if they filled their pockets with stones or if they just accepted
the darkness, the finality of it all: if they wanted it, if it felt like a
mother's womb, if they were aching to return home.



Ethan Wang
Katy, TX
Southwest Region

Ethan Wang is 16 and attends Cinco Ranch High School. Raised by a family with a literary background in China, he was encouraged to read from a young age. His favorite books include *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *The Great Gatsby*. His poems are written as attempts to tell personal stories, depict nostalgia, and embody the disjointed cultures he grew up with. As a result, much of his writing is a battle of overtly traditional styles and themes against more modern ideas. Although Ethan usually writes poems for himself, he has published one collection titled *cloudy Skies*. As the founder of his school's writing club, he looks to encourage others to participate in the field. Ethan is also on his school's debate team, where he serves as an officer. In his spare time, he typically browses the internet, plays farming video games, or listens to chill music. ■

Ember Sky

(annotated)

Flaming lines frame jagged fence
Amber yellow rays paint the sunset
Skies slashed apart with cloud-knives
And a gentle silence reminiscent of dawn
Fills the vacant with the infinitesimal lives.

[i am reminded of the neighbor's Ca de Bou (1.), which splintered itself between the boards of my wooden Yihéyuán (2.) and gutted its own tongue with its shrieking.]

Rosy red, purple pink tufts and wisps
Await late stars, unaccustomed to autumn's days
Tucked behind soft magenta plains
On dew-streaked rooftops lie the city-birds
Another crisp star-specked night earned.

[and do you remember too? when you dropped me rolling on my pavement peppered in concrete acne (3.), and bruised me a hundred laughs. the cuts are still there, and i wince every night i watch hoshi (4.) brimmed choruses line our heavens.]

Known of heart, spoken of mind
A gentle croak echoing faintly
Dainty steps fill ear's sight
To the life residing in the lawn,
Unknowing of those who have gone.

[the hornet by the backdoor hung by a cracked branch, but i hated the whole tree all the same. It was nothing to me, just a wénzi (5.). "why are you so scared of bugs?" my mother poured the molten question behind my ears, folded into my safflower (6.) oil hair.]

To an onyx canvas splayed in the sky
With brushes so often perused and tried

Allow shining eyes and racing mind to behold
Primordial wonder, innate majesty
A piece produced since antiquity.

[i'm sorry, i do not mean to defile my poem. yet it is no sacrament or teaching, no holy Wǔjīng (7). these are no verses of legend, i wrote (8.) these italic lines in the car as i was drowned in melancholy dandelion seeds of sun.]

And I wonder now, as I have sparingly
When my roots have splintered, my threads frayed
My final vows upon the tombstone laid
If the grass should still crawl upon the walls
Or the diminuendo sun fill midnight halls.

1. (catalan: a breed of bulldog, my tongue: idiot dog)
2. (chinese: summer palace, see: historical wastes of money, or boondoggle)
3. (my face: a pattern so enamored with my skin it refuses to part with it)
4. (japanese: star, similar to the same word for desire)
5. (chinese: insect, small puny creatures, my butchered mandarin: words, literature, myself)
6. (spanish: replacement for saffron, second-hand chinese: hóng huā, medicine, life, warmth and blood)
7. (my mother tells me: the great confucian work, my mother in a flash of honesty: something i should have learned)
8. (poetic nonsense: typed on a cracked phone screen or stained laptop at some odd hour)

[perhaps read the poem without the annotations. it tells itself better.]

lend me a grandfather

“your grandfather was cruel”
my mother would whisper to me, as if
it was still a family secret, as if
the neighbors in 3F would discover it one
day
through holes in the thin plaster walls.

and as if he could hear her from
across the Atlantic.
Harbin is such a funny name
for a hometown.

and God knows nothing amused
Qin Shou Sheng.
he thundered, ransacked wooden floor
of its rigidity when he walked.

when the boards stumbled beneath him
grumbling croaks of his ink-blot leather
boots
or the forthright legs of an orator,
everyone shook in turn.

“don’t speak in those barbaric northern
tongues”
he once scolded my mother.
my mother still speaks beautifully,
a pristine mandarin
scratched and bruised just beneath
the underside of her Southerner cheek.

actually, God knows nothing of
Qin Shou Sheng.

i have not seen Him by his side when his
eyes
lost their luster,
or his mouth suddenly stillborn speeches,
festered in his broken mind.

“your grandfather wrote beautifully”
if only the words meant nothing to me
now,
dagger-legged moths about me.
for now he’ll never turn his
gleaming eyes upon me—

dry my mouth for my shameful chinese
or perhaps
praise the lines i wrote in his name.

as my mother and i left the
gladeless home
my grandfather wastes within, he cried
out
as we neared the door.

“don’t go”
he mustered, a single brilliance of
awareness
in his sea of dying neurons.

but he spoke it towards my mother
and i hated him for it.



Anthony John Wiles, Jr.

Sewickley, PA

Northeast Region

Anthony Wiles was born and raised in the town of Ross, just outside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He is a rising junior at the Sewickley Academy, where he is active in several clubs and organizations and writes for the school newspaper and the literary magazine. Anthony is also an avid reader and has been especially influenced by the works of Frank X. Walker and Crystal Good, his greatest poet role models. His family is originally from West Virginia, Georgia, the Carolinas, and Virginia, with most of his forebears residing in the mountains of Appalachia. Because of this, Anthony identifies proudly as an Afrilachian: an African American Appalachian. He is an avid scholar of history, constantly infusing it into his writing. He especially enjoys exploring the way food can be used as an expression and preservation of one's heritage. He tries to tell the stories of those who came before him, as well as to make sense of the world around him through poetry. ■

we went Home to Crystal

we ate
fried chicken: from the krogers in bluewell
collard greens and cornbread on blue paper plates
vanilla pistachio cake and tooth-ache lemonade
in the basement of that little wooden church called Pilgrim.
this was my first time coming Home.
the creek was polluted, the mines were abandoned
we were good eating and Lord praising
i was Home, i was safe
they knew me and they loved me
i belonged to them
and them mountains
Crystal, West by God Virginia
i knew only in memories long gone and never mine.
That Sunday,
we went Home to Crystal.

Know Not I But of Appalachia

Know not I of the islands of the Caribbean Sea
Which jut from the water, with names like
Tortola and Trinidad
But of the rugged, emerald mountains of Appalachia
Crisscrossed by rivers and creeks
That carve out valleys such as the
Shenandoah and Kanawha
Know not I of the waterside towns of
Charlotte Amalie and Port of Spain
Where seas of tourists and locals fuse to form
Cosmopolitan enclaves
But of (nearly) abandoned holler towns like Crystal and McComas
Where gas stations and the occasional general store are the

Only people-bringers
I come not from Caribs and Tainos
Sugarcane plantation African slaves and free West Indian Creoles
Dutch, French, and British slavers,
But from Sapponys and Cherokees
Tri-racial isolate groups, Melungeons
Free and enslaved Africans
Scots-Irish farmers—both master and indentured
I listen not to Soca and Dancehall,
Calypso and Reggae
Where Shenseea, Kes, Koffee, Marley, and Machel are stars
But to Bluegrass and Country
Where Rhiannon and Dolly, The Carolina Chocolate Drops and Valerie June reign
supreme
Lily-white as they (some) may be
I eat not rice and peas,
Mangos and rum
Curry Goat
But beans and cornbread
Apricots and moonshine
Pig's Feet
Yet somehow these people, places, things
I come from,
That I am of
Do not (supposedly) look like me
And thus, I sought refuge
In people, places, things
That (VAGUELY) resembled me,
Represented me
Where I did not see myself,
I fashioned anew
Yet always yearned to see myself in what I always knew
For Appalachia is home
But for all I knew,

It was the place I wasn't meant to be
I saw myself in nothing I'd always embraced as my own
For Appalachia was fed to me
As not to be proud of,
To embrace as my own
A place of despair and disrepair
Where nothing of value and culture exists
Where people like me
Do not exist
So to the West Indies I went
Leaving my heart in Appalachia
My identity caught up in
This jumble of geography
But alas I came home
To find a place where my heart was at peace
Where my identity could rest and be nurtured
Where I could be me
Know not I of the islands of the Caribbean Sea
Which jut from the water, with names like
Tortola and Trinidad
But of the rugged, emerald mountains of Appalachia
Crisscrossed by rivers and creeks that carve out
Valleys like Shenandoah and Kanawha
Where there are people just like me

Chitlins and Hair Grease

A pot of chitlins simmer on a back burner
In Grandma Marie's kitchen
While Tanya and Kiki
Suppress the kinky curls
That sprout from their head
Like halos on an angel
With curling irons, relaxers, and hair grease
This mélange of smells
Of fatty pork freshly cleansed of
The pig shit that clung to it
By loving hands
That ripped out soft, healthy hair
With brushes and combs
And burned the rest
With lye-relaxers and iron contraptions
In attempts to make it "good"
The same way they
Scrubbed and scrubbed
The intestines of swine
To make them "good"
Is this not what being Black is?
Taking Massa's trash
Adding "soul" to it
Taking the "soul" from
The luscious locks of Keisha
And "fixing" them
To make her look more like Lindsay
Priding ourselves on preserving our history,
While shaming ourselves for
Wearing our natural beauty
Because somehow
We can eat foods that are unique to us
But can't look the way

That is only unique to us
Chitlins and hair grease
They're a part of our history
A part of our story
But chitlins and hair grease
Shouldn't stop us from
Being who we are
From cornbread to cornrows,
Black food and black beauty
Are ours and ours alone
So don't let anyone tell us what we have to be
So eat your chitlins
And slap on that hair grease
With a healthy dash of hot sauce and history
So you know who you're meant to be



Isabella Ramirez
Lake Worth, FL
Southeast Region

Isabella Ramirez is a rising senior and communications major at Alexander W. Dreyfoos School of the Arts. She is the editor-in-chief of her school's yearbook and the production managing editor of *The Muse* newsmagazine. In 2019, Isabella was a Scholastic Gold Medalist in journalism. She has twice had her poetry published in *Seeds Literary & Arts Magazine*. In her junior year, Isabella joined her school's slam poetry team and began to take poetry more seriously. In March 2020, she progressed to the Louder Than A Bomb Florida team semifinals and was an individual finalist. She hopes that through slam poetry, she can provide a voice for the Latinx and LGBTQ+ community. ■

Mama

i'm sitting on my mama's bed
and she's on the brink of a mental breakdown
over her homework
i can see the glint of a blinking cursor
tears glossing over her eyes
as her hands search for words in a language
all too foreign to her.

she said i could count in both spanish and english
by the time i was 18 months old
but it's taken her 21 years and counting to flatten out
the unruly kinks of her language

my mama's English
is a stubborn wine stain on a white dress
she scrubs at her twisted tongue desperate
to clean the spice, el cilantro, la salsa
that is her accent.
her accent is the tambourine she hides
in the back of her mouth
behind the ivory piano keys that are her teeth
she speaks a merengue, bachata, ranchera, tonada
that she mutes to make room
for her English.

my mama's English
gets told it's pretty good,
for being an immigrant
to which she replies
you've got some nerve
for being a gringa
because my mama wasn't a stay-at-home mom
for fifteen years to be told that her English
needed housekeeping.

the beauty of my mama's English
is that she doesn't need it
to knock your head off your shoulders
call her a luchador
cuz she can make you tap out faster
than you can say
her English isn't good enough.

my mama's English
is me correcting her at the dinner table
it's me laughing when she can't find
the right syllables and sounds
and the words don't fit quite right
in her mouth.
it's the downturn of her lips
at the expense of my smile
because her English is not
the punchline of a joke
that's gotten too old.

my mama's English
is the piñata she got me on my 10th birthday
big and bright and pink and purple
but hollow on the inside
it's her count to three
uno, dos, tres
as she spun me blindfolded
dizzy and facing the wrong direction
it's the swing and miss of my bat
and the candy and confetti that fall
in the final hit that breaks it open.
it's a game of pin the tail on the donkey
no matter how many times you play
you never just get it quite right.
it's the quinceñera I never had
overrated and stereotypical

distastefully too latina
it's the number birthday candles
that melt hot wax onto the cake
she made from scratch
it's the reason my birthday is not just
a happy birthday but a feliz cumpleaños
it's the reason that when i go to my friend's parties
i want to sing happy birthday twice
because mama never let us blow out candles
before singing en Español.

my mama's English
is the one dollar and 35 cent Cuban coffee
i drive her to get every saturday
itching at the back of her throat
bitter and hard to swallow
only sweet from the sugar left
in the foam she licks off her top lip
it's the reason she insists
the starbucks double espresso
doesn't have the same kick.

it's the reason i'm sitting on mama's bed
watching her eyes swell as she fumbles with the keys
it's the reason she got into graduate school at 42
why i help her with her homework before i do my own
it's why the bottom of her computer burns my lap
with each oxford comma and restructured sentence
and fixed grammar rule

it's why she doesn't end up crying
when i whisper that everything will be ok

my mama's English
is the reason i can tell her in two ways
that she is my everything, mi todo
because her love knows no language.

De tal palo tal astilla

it's superbowl sunday with your son
and he's wearing your favorite kansas city chiefs jersey
like a cape.
he holds his coke can to his chest
like you balance your budweiser on your belly
laughs at the barbeque in your beard
and hopes he'll grow up to be just like daddy someday.
but then the halftime show comes on,
and suddenly your family-friendly event—
you know, the one that encourages boys
to take their tackles and concussions like men—
is ruined the moment two Latinas take an American stage.
and when you gasp in mock disapproval, you'll shield your son's eyes
from the "obscenities" on screen because
you're afraid he'll look at Shakira and J. Lo the same way you look at them.

look at them the way I've been looked at my entire life.
look at them the way I was looked at sitting in a shoe store
while my dad shopped for sneakers two aisles over
by a group of men my father's age.
i heard their heavy boots before i heard their whistles call me "chica."
I was eight years old the first time I was made to carry sex appeal.

or maybe you're afraid your sweet son
will become a Cody,
the 22-year-old guy who approached me
after dual enrollment at community college
and asked me who i was waiting for.
didn't stop when i said "my mom" even though
he knew i wasn't even old enough to drive a car.
complimented my shirt and jewelry
but what he meant was that he liked the way
my gold chain dipped from my collarbone to my chest

that from my gold hoops he could tell that my hips don't lie
he called me "exotic"
turned my nationality into a flirty guessing game.
"you must be Puerto Rican, no, Colombian, no, Mexican, no,
Venezuelan, Cuban, Argentinian, Dominican??—"

no.
what i am is sick and tired of men like you
fetishizing my culture.
what i am is sick of old white man thinking i can be
their "hot-tamale" token Latina trophy wife
i am sick and tired of being cast as the "Spicy Latina" television trope
i am not your sexy maid turned homewrecker
hypersexual, hot-blooded, hothead
your sassy, sensual Sofia Vergara type,
some big breasted brainless beauty
i am Latina.
i am conditioned to be treated this way
through a history of submission and subjugation
you see, i've learned we Latinas have been
a white man's conquest for centuries.

i've learned you only like my exploitation
when it's convenient for you.
that it's ok for your private pleasure
at a shoe store or on the streets,
but the moment a Latina takes pride, is empowered by her culture
she is inappropriate, disgusting, crude, suddenly too sexy
we have become a disruption to your family-friendly game of violence
for something far more harmful to children:
Latina women dancing, apparently, because at least
football players have the decency to cover their bodies.
but no one remembers that Adam Levine performed shirtless last year,
or that Lady Gaga wore a barely there bodysuit
or what nearly-nude thing Katy Perry, Madonna, or Britney Spears wore

because at least their curves
are subdued by white.

even though you'll cover your son's eyes
you can't protect him.
he'll become just what you raised him to be.
look at women like me the way men like you do.
you've made him blind to his own hypocrisy.
and when your son becomes a man
you'll take pride in your creation.

Eligibility

For students to be considered for the National Student Poets Program, they must have received a National Gold or Silver Medal in poetry in the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. Students must also be in grade 10 or 11 and enrolled in a public, private, parochial, or home school in the United States.

Founded in 1923, the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards continue to be the longest-running, most prestigious recognition program for creative teens in the U.S., and the largest source in the nation of scholarships for young artists and writers. Deadlines to participate in the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards vary by region and may be found at artandwriting.org.

From the pool of Scholastic Awards National Medalists in poetry, thirty-five semifinalists for the National Student Poets Program are selected in the spring. Each semifinalist is notified and asked to submit additional poetry (two to five works total), two short videos about themselves, and a bio for consideration by a national jury panel.

A national jury of literary luminaries and leaders in education and the arts helps to select the five National Student Poets. Submissions are evaluated based on the National Student Poets Program's three criteria: creativity, dedication to craft, and promise.



**Scholastic
Art & Writing
Awards**

Alliance for
Young Artists
& Writers