

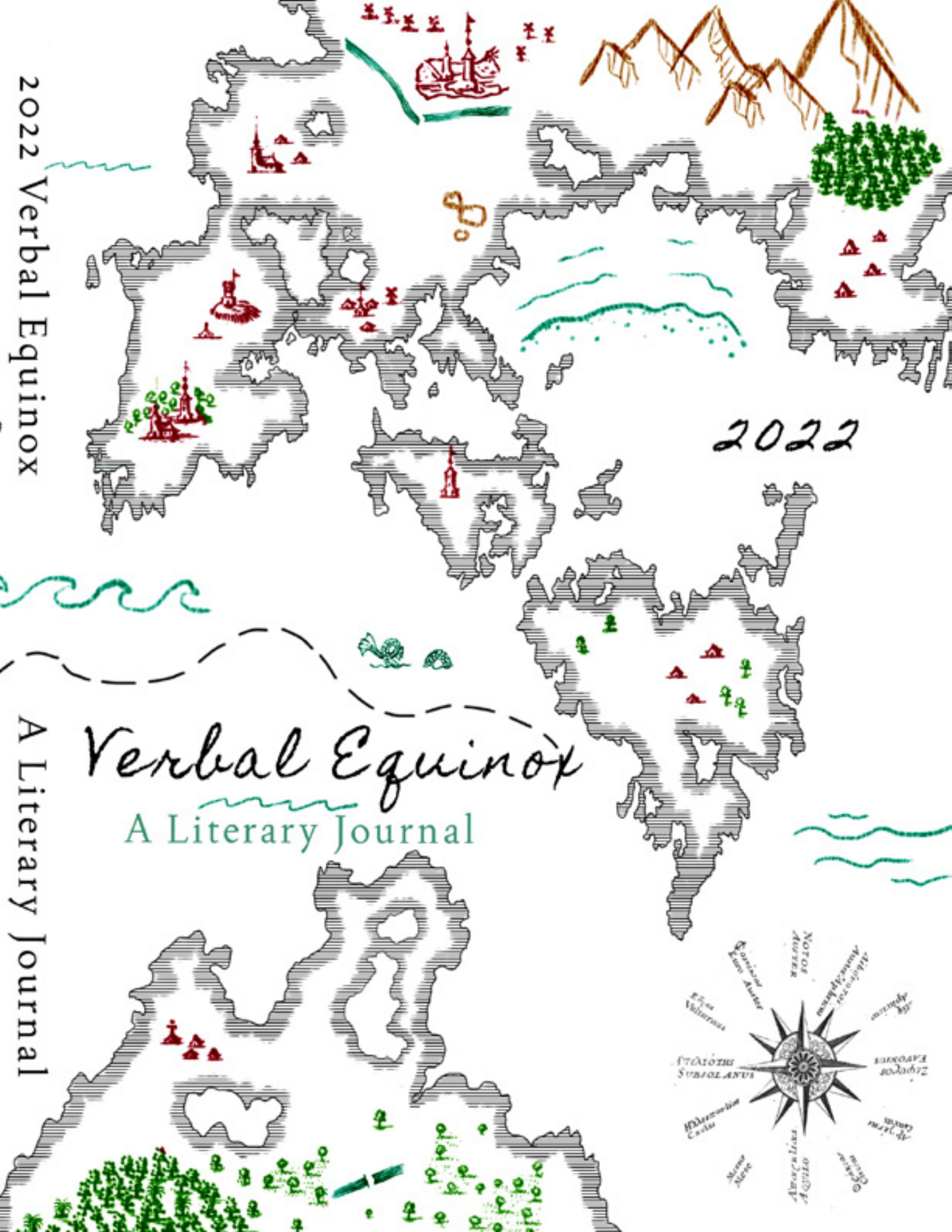
2022 Verbal Equinox

A Literary Journal

2022

# Verbal Equinox

A Literary Journal



Editor's

# Introduction

Verbal Equinox is an annual publication by the Weber State University Writing Center. It is managed by our staff of tutors and features writing from students, tutors, and faculty. In previous years, this publication has become more strictly academic; however, in consideration of the times we are currently living and thinking in, we have reopened this edition to allow for creative works that explore feeling and existence in a bite-sized, easily digestible manner.

This edition is entirely composed of submissions from our tutors, exploring a wide range of topics not limited to tutoring or academic work. We wanted to know what ideas the muses have been whispering and what connections could be found therein and encouraged our tutors to branch out and explore their own thoughts. The past few years have been especially emotionally and psychologically fraught, and so we wanted our tutors to have a space to explore things that have been on their minds or ideas they've wanted to write about but perhaps needed a push to fully realize.

Our theme for this edition is *Connections*, which I have broadly defined to allow our tutors a chance to deviate from set themes of tutoring or academia to explore an external topic and how they may, or may not, connect to a text, tutoring, writing, or the human condition. The resulting works we have assembled are a series of stories, meditations, and reflections on life, writing, reading, and more that I feel contain a mixture of reality and hope.

As a reflection of the Transcendental tradition, I believe that the key to a genuine expression of what it means to be human requires reading as much as we can, writing even more, and thinking even more than that. We seek to see the world around us and continually annotate our lives by listening to our own thoughts and responses to external stimuli. The most important things in life are fragile, and if we don't stop to notice them, we will miss them; to see with our heart, through our senses, is the acme of the human experience. This is permission to stop striving and grinding and allow yourself to be alone with your own thoughts – explore an idea that has been whispering in your mind and use it to annotate your life.

In tough times we find value in creation above all else. We hope that you experience the comfort of creativity as you peruse this edition.

Alexis J. Taylor  
Editor in Chief

# Verbal Equinox

## Connections

## Contributors

### Copy Editor

William Maxfield

### Copy Editor

Porter Lunceford

### Copy Editor

Amy Kees

### Copy Editor

Crystal Rothanburg

### Design Editor

Miranda Spaulding

### Editor in Chief

Alexis J. Taylor

### Executive Editor

Claire Hughes

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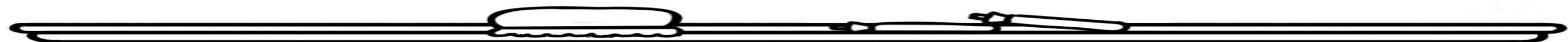
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# Learning to Start by Learning to Finish

## A Meditative Essay

Ever since I was a kid, I enjoyed reading, yet I struggled hard.

Between boring books, dyslexia, and my own expectations, I had plenty of excuses not to read; excuses that piled up, that allowed me to opt out of really trying. 2020 brought me both the drive and the need to do something with my time, but it would be 2021 before I truly became a reader. At first, I attacked reading without adjusting my approach. I kept all the rules I'd learned through school, and I failed. I found myself searching for the perfect novel, the perfect plot, for a story that would have me hooked on the first page, maybe even on the first word. Learning to read well and coming to enjoy reading required me to change the rules I'd always followed. Without these changes, my goal for reading would be little more than a wish, languishing alongside my to-be-read pile. I learned to do my research, to persevere, and to track my progress. But most importantly, I learned to finish what I started.

For many readers, life is too short to finish a “bad” book. For some, that can mean setting aside a dull plot, for others, ditching an unlikable character. For me, it meant reading between 20 and 50 pages before, well, quitting. Often, I would chalk it up to the story just not hooking me, placing the burden on the author, rather than the choice of stopping place. Imagine a 300-page novel. In that context, 20-50 pages is about 7-15% of the overall story. Now compare that to a 90-minute film; 15% of that film would place the viewer at 13.5 minutes. I doubt that many moviegoers would choose to give up on a film after less than 15 minutes, yet I did just that with many novels over the years.

our characters realize the situation they're in as the ground falls beneath their feet, or they finally receive the prophecy that will direct the rest of the narrative.

Choosing to commit to a third of the novel ultimately did more than help me develop my skills and hone my perseverance: it encouraged me to finish. After coming so far, the remaining pages feel more manageable. The plot feels like it's heading somewhere; like the characters are experiencing problems and finding solutions, like beautiful days have become clouded, bringing on a storm. By 30%, things are happening, and it's a lot harder to say “*This isn't for me.*”

That doesn't mean I've loved every book or even that I've considered these novels “good.” Rather, no matter the quality, I find joy in the completion of the story, in seeing it as a whole, and in thinking critically about the aspects that I do and don't like. Instead of focusing on finding something perfect, I focus more on adding stories to my mental library, following a narrative to the conclusion, and finishing.

Learning to read as a hobby meant learning to push through, past those first few chapters, past the introductions to settings and characters, and often on to the inciting incident. After tracking my reading position and aiming for more than my typical 50 pages, I found the sweet spot of storytelling that has gotten me through almost 70 novels with zero abandoned: the 30% rule.

While many novels begin building important details and plot points far earlier, I've found that many don't hit their stride until the 30% mark.

At this point, the reader generally has a sense of the plot, setting, and characters, and 30% tends to mark where the established elements begin to change. It is about this time when



AMY KEES

Master in Creative Writing

*The blank page awaits,  
fresh and new, and as  
you stare,  
it stares back at you*



# Tutoring Poetry

## A Sequence of Haikus

Connection is formed  
Dendrites need repetition  
Learning must take time

Please print your paper  
Out loud the faults are clearer  
Create life in words

Busy can be hard  
I want to give my whole self  
Each student needs more

Celebrate your words  
What you think is important  
Opinions have worth

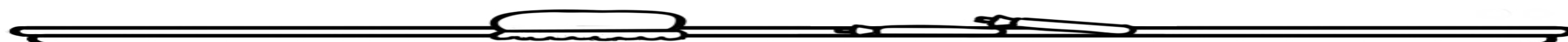
Reach out when you're stuck  
Ideas flourish with others  
We are here to help



MIRANDA SPAULDING

Professional and Technical  
Writing

*Tutoring is soft  
Embrace error and  
mistake*



# Empathy Through Fiction

## A Meditative Essay

Often when someone thinks of fantasy literature, their mind may wander to *Harry Potter* or *The Lord of the Rings* series. It might evoke tales in which characters fight dragons and go on epic adventures with no real reason other than to save a princess or because they wanted something more. In some cases, that may be what fantasy literature is; however, fantasy literature can go much deeper than the surface of legendary battles or brand-new wizards.

Despite its less realistic nature, fantasy literature can teach a reader essential empathy and expose them to complex social issues in a way that is more engaging and less confrontational.

Fantasy also has a way of bringing people together who may not otherwise engage with one another.

Fantasy literature is often riddled with metaphors and imagery that serve a couple of main purposes: they describe the world in great detail and immerses the reader in the world. While on the surface it may seem as though this holds little to no value, it can be argued that the opposite is true. For example, Tolkien invented an entire language to better immerse his readers, and this language, commonly called the Elvish language, is now offered as a “foreign” historical language through some language learning programs.

By using metaphors and imagery, a reader can explore more complex social issues less confrontationally.

For instance, in N.K. Jemisin’s *The Broken Earth* trilogy, Jemisin depicts a world in which the government treats magic users as lesser beings. Throughout the three novels in this series, the reader gets to explore this unjust, broken world and “what might drive someone to shatter the world” (Cunningham). In other words, Jemisin has created a safe space for readers to explore the ideas of racism and inequality.

While this particular series does not seem to be suitable for younger audiences, this same principle applies to other series, such as the *Harry Potter* series. It is most prominent in *Harry Potter* with muggles and wizards, and it can be broken down even further into pureblood, half-blood, and muggle-born wizards.

In general, literature offers readers a chance to step outside of their own world, hang up their own thoughts like a wet raincoat, and enter the world of another.

Oftentimes, the character the reader finds themselves following is either a mirror of the reader or a window for the reader to look through and gain a view of the world different from their own. What this means is that the reader can either see pieces of themselves in the hero of the story, or they get to glance into the life of someone else. While this is true for any genre of literature, fantasy literature offers a much more engaging setting. After all, wouldn’t it be more compelling to learn about others in a fantastic setting?

Readers, especially young, emerging readers, are more likely to want to read a novel that interests them; encouraging them to read what they are interested in means that they will be more engaged in their “accidental” learning of this empathy which also ends up fostering a love of reading.

In addition to teaching readers about empathy and complex social issues, fantasy literature can bring people together who may not have otherwise known each other. One popular example of this is the community surrounding the *Harry Potter* series. Since the first book in the series was released in 1997, there has been an ever-expanding community of people who have taken comfort in the story. Fan-created conventions, podcasts, and even musicals have eternalized the story for many and created a community that has lasted longer than the initial interest would have led critical reviewers to believe.



Another example strays a little bit from the literature aspect; however, it does stay within the realm of fantasy. Dungeons and Dragons is a fantasy tabletop roleplaying game that was released in 1974. Its creators claim that “over 50 million people have played Dungeons and Dragons to date” (Wieland).

In many cases, this collaborative storytelling game has created the opportunity for people to get to know one another on a much deeper level. It has additionally offered the opportunity of creating literature based around the stories told, such as with the popular Dungeons and Dragons show *Critical Role*.

Some people have banned fantasy books, like *Harry Potter* and *Dungeons and Dragons*, claiming that these books promote witchcraft and devilry. These people seem to only see the surface level of the novels where the magic use is most prevalent. In 2019, a Catholic school banned the *Harry Potter* series after speaking to multiple exorcists. A pastor at the school, Rev. Dan Reehil, cited that the curses and spells are real and “when read by a human being risk conjuring evil spirits into the presence of the person reading the text” (qtd. in Farzan).

While this case does not reflect the opinions of the entirety of the Catholic church, it is still important to note real-life examples of these books being banned. In cases where parents do not want their children to read books like *Harry Potter*, there are still other options. These parents may be more inclined to allow their children to read fairy tales, such as “Cinderella” or “Little Red Riding Hood.” While these still fall under the fantasy genre, they do tend to be more age-appropriate, especially when we look at the Disney versions of these stories.

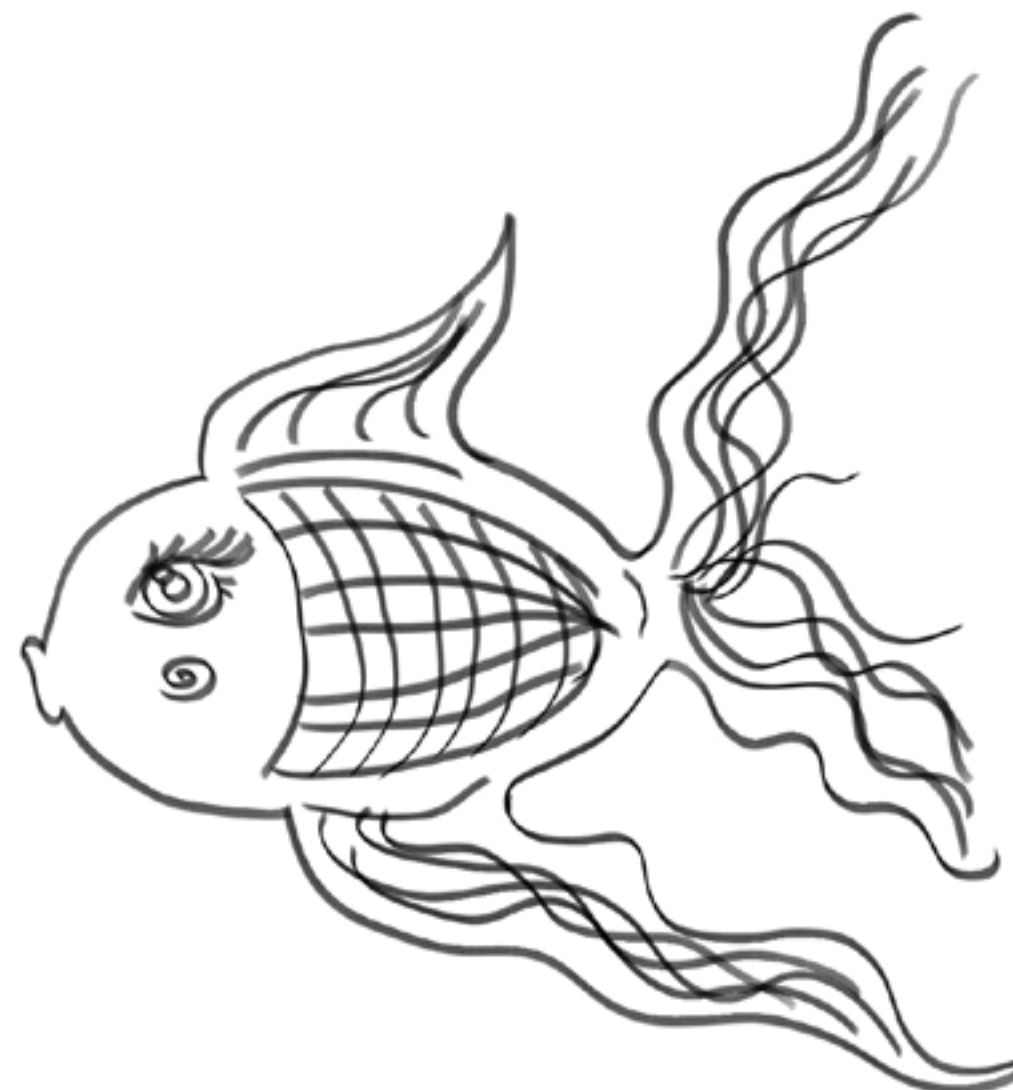
Overall, fantasy literature creates a safe and engaging environment in which readers can explore complex topics and bond with one another. Readers are much more likely to engage with the text they are reading when it is something that interests them, and just because that text is of the fantasy genre, it should not be overlooked or thought inessential.

In the grand scheme of things, genres are only a vessel for telling a story, teaching a lesson, and encouraging empathy.

Genre preferences should not be the determiner of whether or not a piece of literature is capable of teaching empathy. If the genre encourages anyone to read, it is a worthwhile piece of literature.

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CRYSTAL ROTHANBURG

English Major

Bring your paper ‘round  
I want to see what you wrote  
I am sure it’s great



# Creative Writing as a Form of Resilience

## An Editorial Reflection

In Fall 2021, a creative writing teacher assigned my Master of Arts in English (MENG) class an assignment titled “Morning Notes,” which required students to take a legal pad notebook and write three whole pages every morning for a month. The goal was to build a daily habit of just sitting down and writing. Even if it was the phrase “I hate this!” over and over and over again until we completely filled the three pages for the day, approximately ninety pages total.

I started my morning papers the day my undergraduate first block class ended, inadvertently embarking on this odd journey during an already stressful weekend as I scrambled to grade all of my students’ final projects and rewrites by the English Department deadline of the following Monday.

What commenced was an odd rant about how I didn’t quite know what to write. The writing followed a fickle stream-of-consciousness style that could abruptly shift gears without even finishing a thought. As the daily entries mounted, I began marking those lurches in thoughts with double slashes (//) to avoid losing stream. My thoughts scattered all over the place like errant fallen leaves on a breeze—jumping from real life concerns about my final graduate papers to the fiction projects I was currently shelving due to lack of time and back again without rhyme or reason; my brain dragged me on detours I hadn’t anticipated when I sat down to pen my first page of the day.

Gradually, a distinct pattern seemingly manifested. I spent the first of my three pages just complaining—expelling whatever current frustration, anxiety, or rant against perceived first-world problems happened to be on my mind that morning. These surprisingly visceral, bitter complaints were born of a lack of sleep, an endless To Do List that incessantly mocked its unfortunate victim, and the universe’s decision to continually one up itself at my expense.

Then, seemingly at random, I’d switch gears and launch into the latest theme, plot idea, or writing technique that I had been itching to try.

In one section, I even went on a giant rant that named all the shades of color I could think of at that moment: “saffron gold, robin’s egg blue, ash, slate, storm cloud gray, poinsettia red, traffic light green, parchment yellow.”

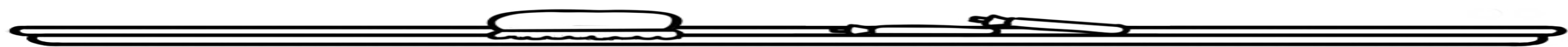
Skimming through my morning notes, I felt myself articulating my thematic style as a writer as I rambled about the themes that fascinated, the creative pieces and genres I felt drawn to, plot beats that occurred to me, the tropes that frustrated or intrigued me, and the innate details or images I wanted to convey in my own work: “This morning the mountains look

like black cutouts against a dusty turquoise sky.”

Sometimes, I would then treat that insight as a jumping off point for some actual creative writing that would spill onto the third (and occasionally fourth) page. Of course, this approach of using writing as a form of unfettered self-expression is nothing new. As I discovered in another graduate course, Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Massachusetts Amherst Peter Elbow argues that to learn to write well “people have to learn to write a lot, to write garbage” (“Freewriting” 6).

When describing his proposed method of freewriting, Elbow presents it as “the act of producing unplanned language and unplanned thinking,” which mirrored my own rambling, tangential morning pages (“Freewriting” 12).

At times, the mere act of candid writing was more therapeutic than the content I produced because the morning notes provided a blank space to vent and ruminate. When transposing this mentality into her creative writing classroom, Carolyn Jess-Cooke argues that such free writing and expression in creative writing can serve a therapeutic function by providing a “a vehicle for processing emotional trauma and facilitating wellbeing” to strengthen students’ resilience (254).





As I embarked on my graduate studies in tumultuous 2020, juggled four part-time jobs (including teaching), and continued supporting flustered undergraduate students from all walks of life with their recent struggles, this “free writing” and unrestrained expression kept me tethered during the grating, high-stress environment of the COVID-19 pandemic.

*This designated morning time to write forced me to process my daily emotions and dive into more creative outlets, which reduced my daily anxiety throughout the day.*

Having that time to reflect early in the day helped me escape those paralyzing brain loops by allowing me to recenter mentally and creatively. The act of writing out these mundane thoughts made the thoughts and ideas feel more concrete, which allowed me to stop mentally dwelling on them because I knew they were preserved on paper elsewhere.

However, I suspect it was the anonymity of the morning pages that made it such a powerful therapeutic tool for me. My instructor had made it clear from the beginning that he would never read a word and only asked that we, the students, flip through our finished notebooks to demonstrate we had written something, anything.

Since there was no disembodied audience lurking over my shoulder, I could write anything and everything that came to mind without fear of treading on toes. Without that promise of anonymity, sitting down to write would have been more paralyzing than freeing. Anonymity presented me with the chance to spend my mornings writing surface-level “garbage” that no one else would ever read but I could pick apart later and mine for something worth keeping.

The two creative pieces published in this issue, for example, started as odd ruminations in my morning notes that developed into something more. By providing a blank space to ruminate on writing projects, life, and absolute nonsense in equal measure without fear of a judgemental audience, the daily routine of the morning pages provided a therapeutic and creative outlet for me that kept me grounded during stressful times.

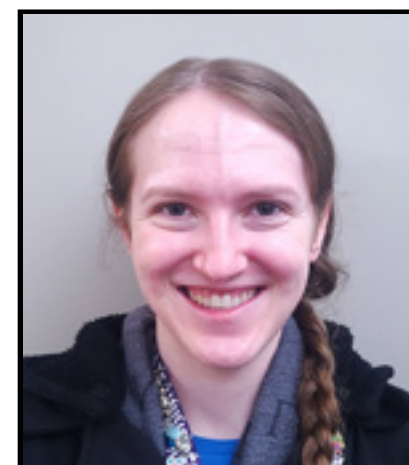
To be a writer, one must learn to find the time to write and embrace the act of writing, of self-expression. Even if most of the writing seems, at first glance, to be rambling nonsense.



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SARAH TAYLOR

Aspiring Master in English Literature

*Frazzled tutees plead,  
Rising clamor: Flow?  
Grammar??*

*Thus, reach self-belief*

# Sunrise

A Poem by Devon Hoxer

Watching  
feathery, chalk-pink clouds unfold  
above glowing, snow-capped peaks —  
fresh & full of magic.  
The shifting, slowly emerging light  
brings life to the sections of landscape  
to which it pays attention:  
this  
particular peak, that  
patch of wheat,  
then moving on, changing.

Waking the world up with its gaze,  
bringing dazed remnants of dreams,  
the foggy, dazzled tactile sensation of it.  
Like morning just starting to pulse  
through your fingers,  
muscles  
remembering their role,  
remembering how to grasp the world.

Or with waking eyes still  
cling to moonbeams,  
dream-state,  
you look at the tea kettle  
with a little more possibility,  
as if you'd forgotten what a pleasant  
shape it has.

Behold:  
You can hold a moment without holding  
on.  
& that which shines bright,  
no doubt,  
has your eyes fixed upon.





# Backyard Uprising

## A Fictional Short Story

When eccentric forty-six year old Reginald acquired Yolanda, aged nineteen, as his wife a warm summer evening in 1981, the backyard revolted.

The wedding imposed itself on his impressive 150 acre estate complete with rolling green hills, towering trees, and bedazzled gazebo that sheltered Terrance, the drowsy potted Calathea plant. A crew of imported gardeners waged constant war on the yard—raking stray leaves into yawning trash bags, adding painted neon stones to the Japanese garden, trimming crooked branches that refused to fall in line, and leaving snippy eviction letters for the magpies who chattered overhead. To add insult to injury, the gardeners coated the garden in heavy-duty, falsely floral Febreze then lugged out mahogany chairs and tables, ignoring the Kentucky blue grass's screams of protest at the rows of scarred and torn neighbors left damaged in their wake.

As if waiting for the moment, as soon as the bride confirmed “I do,” the magpies in the junipers dive bombed guests with painted foam bullets they had salvaged from adolescent neighborhood bullies.

Amidst the balding Catholic priest's call for order, Reginald tossed his new wife over the white picket fence then burrowed under the lowest plank to the field beyond. Clambering over chairs, the guests bolted for the garden gate only to be pinned against the fence by the magpies in a pincer move. Terrance the potted plant remained rooted in their pot, a passive observer to pandemonium, while Clarence the cricket bounded from table to table. Hoisting a stolen camera aloft, Clarence captured blurred snapshots of the carnage until he mistimed his jump and belly-flopped into the punch bowl where he floated listless amongst the melting ice caps.

After the final straggling survivors squeezed through bullet holes in the fence, a black-billed magpie alighted on the glittering steps of the bedazzled gazebo beneath the wedding arch's wilting roses. Adjusting his pitch-black wings, Caval pivoted to address his magpies warriors in a chirping cry:

“The law of the backyard jungle is clear. Unlike our distant fowl cousins, we can gaze into a mirror and perceive the stuffed puppets in the reflection. Yet, despite our intelligence, we are maligned. Historically, humans have always. . .”

The flock of new recruits diverted attention from their ranting leader's cockeyed strut to preen their primary feathers with well-oiled beaks and admire their metallic sheen reflected in silver cutlery. Still giddy in the wake of their triumph, the veteran magpies swarmed the six-tiered rum cake who swayed, too tipsy to notice.

Beady eyes darting round to feathered comrades, Caval's rapid warble rose an octave, “There is not enough nesting space for all. The old two-legged clod and his guests will return with reinforcements to reclaim our terrain. We must eradicate them from the terrace. None of this gossiping twitter, devoid of winged action.”

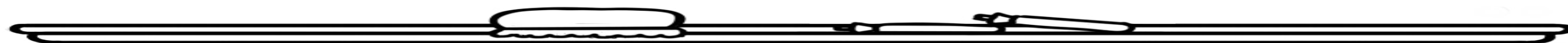
Finally noticing the rallying call, the enlisted fowl erupted into chattering caws. Estimating their active flock members, they split into squads with the suspiciously sanguine screech: “a winter's supply of beetles to the bird who spots the bride!” Plucking errant crumbs from the cake platter, they swooped after fleeing targets.

As the battle waged, a twilight dusk descended upon overturned chairs. The garden grew lethargic under its own suppressed silence. A lone figure approached the yard. Now barefoot, the bride Yolanda hiked her gown up and clambered back over the battered, bullet-riddled picket fence.

The grass seethed venomous whispers at the sheer disregard once more but failed to catch the bridezilla's hissed tirades about “my special day,” “principle,” and “have to do everything myself.”

Hoisting a flame thrower over a bony shoulder, she slipped between the yard's lengthening shadows and into Reginald's mansion.

Meanwhile, back at the bedazzled gazebo, Terrance the potted Calathea plant picked up their pot and inched toward the wireless radio. With steady leaf tips, Terrance began twitching the dials and muttering, “I don't get it.”



Clarence the cricket, rousing from his punch-induced stupor, peered at the Calathea plant. Taking in the broad, stripped leaves, that glossy almost artificial tint, he announced, "It's for the revolution. Obviously."

Long confined to the gazebo, Terrance wobbled in their pot.

"What revolution?"

"The revolution. The one where we finally take back what's ours."

"Ours?"

"Yeah. We've got to stay here and carve out our livelihood!"

Terrance, whose livelihood consisted of sunshine and rain, turned back to the radio.

"So, a revolt?"

"No, a revolution!" Clarence the cricket tittered irritably as he grappled with elusive ice chips.

"What's the difference?"

Clarence struggled to heave himself out of the slick crystal bowl.

"How the hell should I know? I'm just a spectator." His jumping legs thrashed in pink punch. "Where's your sense of drama, of tragedy, of history?"

Terrance merely twisted the volume dial up as far it would go. Switching back and forth between Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and salsa music, the potted plant swayed on an empty breeze as the house and backyard burned.



SARAH TAYLOR

Aspiring Master in English Literature

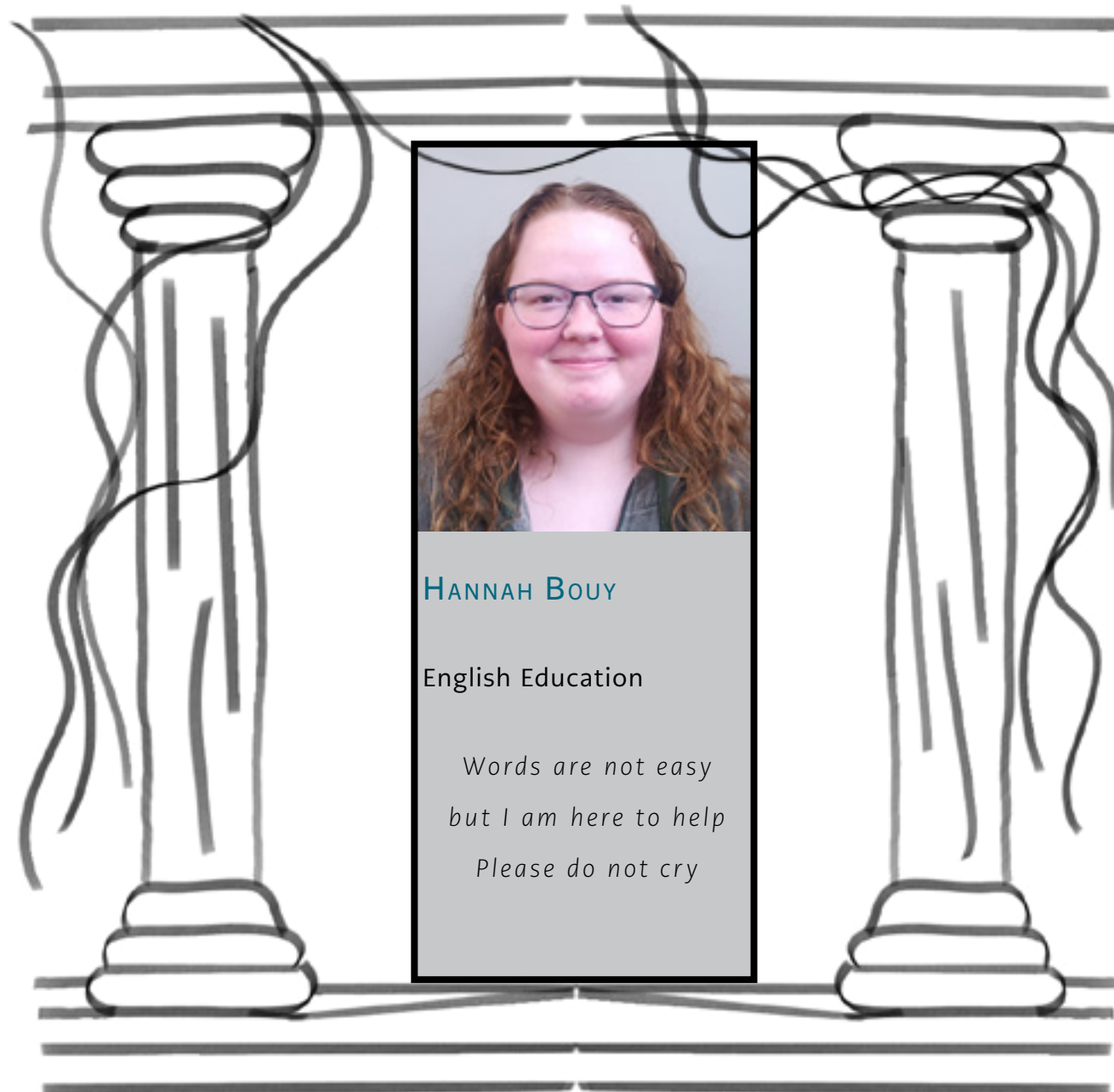
Frazzled tutees plead,  
Rising clamor: Flow?  
Grammar??  
Thus, reach self-belief





# Iago Presents Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in Writing Center Romeo & J

## A Parody Play



Production Materials Property of  
Weber State University Writing Center  
Casting by Hannah and Alexis

Romeo ----- Amy  
Juliet "J" ----- Porter  
Rosencrantz/Mercutio "Struggling ENGL 1010 Student" ----- Hannah  
Guildenstern/Benvolio "Friend who shows up with food" ----- Alexis  
Nurse ----- Claire  
Friar Lawrence ----- Kyle  
Tybalt "Business Major" ----- Reed  
Rosalyn ----- Devon  
Paris ----- William  
Montague Daddy ----- Crystal  
Capulet Daddy ----- Dr. JBF  
Montague Mother (will need bathrobe and curlers) ----- Miranda  
Capulet Mother (will need bathrobe and curlers) ----- Eliza  
Iago/Apothecary who supplied the poisons ----- Sarah  
Ghost of Hamlet's Dad/Ophelia in the nunnery ----- Kelly

### Critical Reviews:

"The best fever dream I've ever had!"

- S. Meyers Contemporary Western Reviews

"A moment of clarity in a world in so much disarray."

- A. Taylor A Metaphoric Parable

"Not sure what was happening, but 11/10 recommend!"

-C. Rothanburg Writers Unite

"One word: What?! But also, why do I love it??"

-A. Kees League of Extraordinary Writers

"The mashup I never knew I needed, but has blessed my life tremendously. A+ performance with a cast of the highest caliber."

- S. Williams New Yorkish Review

# Institutions and Tutoring

## A Reflection

I have worked as a tutor at the Weber State University Writing Center for a little under three years now. Since I first started back in 2019, I have had the unique opportunity to spend the majority of 2020-21 working as a tutor remotely through online sessions. I have also had the privilege of a new perspective after starting work in 2022 as a Graduate Teaching Assistant here at WSU.

After working as a tutor in person for a year, a sudden shift to online tutoring was a jarring one. The approach is completely different, by necessity, and students tend to respond differently in a video call than they do if they are in the same room with us. Likewise, the shift from tutor to instructor is just as jarring.



WILLIAM MAXFIELD

Master in Creative Writing

*Know where you have  
been  
to know where you are  
going*

The power dynamic changes, but so does the method of delivery. Rather than working with a student one-on-one, I am faced with the brutal calculus of the classroom. For example, instructors are faced with decisions like the following: I will focus on this topic today because it will be the most efficient for the majority of the students. This is in stark contrast to the flexibility of the one-on-one session where the student helps to focus the topic.

After returning to WSU to work as a tutor face-to-face in the fall of 2021, and after working as a TA, I have been reflecting on these changes. I found that both of these shifts were unsettling, even leading to a kind of “tutoring crisis” where I began to question my approach to tutoring and even began to wonder what the exact nature of my job was. I felt that I was often repeating the same advice to students over and over. I began to wonder why I should be giving advice about topics like grammar and formatting when instructors would go over the very same thing in the classroom. That was the more efficient method, after all.

This is when I reached the thought that I may have been approaching tutoring in the wrong way.

I was definitely an effective tutor, but I found that I was too focused on academia. Upon reflecting on the recent changes in my life, I came to the conclusion that I had been effectively institutionalized. While unsettling, I found that these shifts were ultimately enlightening. My goal here is not to provide a solution or to preach about how anyone should approach tutoring but rather to outline my overall thought process and to identify what I value most about being a writing tutor.

Institutionalization is not an overnight change, especially when it comes to the major institution of academia.

As I have reflected on the past years, I have found that I am the proverbial frog, boiling in the richness of the academy before I even knew that I liked it.

I started where most of us probably start, where I see many students starting even now: not wanting to be here. I hated the school system. I felt bored by the lessons, frustrated by the seemingly arbitrary tests and benchmarks, and relatively unseen as my own individual person. I had teachers that I liked, of course, and guess which feature made

me like them? I liked teachers that not only saw me as a person but approached their teaching with a nuance. I would always smile at phrases like “well, this is what the book says, but here is why I disagree.”

I thought I liked the notion of beating the system, of standing up and rebelling against the system. In retrospect, I think what I really enjoyed was the act of free, and critical, thinking.

One result I remember well was a particularly dry paper that I composed for one of my introduction to literature courses.

I was told to go the opposite direction to what I had been previously told, to include “I” statements and my personal stories. It seemed absurd. What business





did I have being present in my own writing? Facetious remarks aside, I genuinely felt like a stranger in my own work.

*It had been so long since I had written from a place of honesty, from a place of truly critical thinking, that it felt unusual.*

I tried what my professor told me to try and felt an extreme level of discomfort. But I saw what he was getting at, and my work became less dry over time.

The biggest mistake I would make early on as a writing tutor was to consider myself as an information delivery device. I considered a session to have gone well if I had explained a grammatical concept or illustrated a rule/technique for the writer to keep in mind. At best this would leave the student with a refresher on some concept or another, but at worst it would negate and ignore the many aspects of the paper the student had worked hard on.

In other words, a focus on the small details and rules to learn is a good way to establish a universal template for writing. If the thesis statement is not in the introductory paragraph, for example, then we have a problem. The real problem, of course, is telling anyone that a choice they made in their writing is a problem, or simply an error to be fixed.

Much of this was familiar to me through the tutor training course I had been a part of and through the many pedagogical discussions I had engaged in with my fellow tutors. And yet, I believe I approached the situation from the wrong place. I saw only the tier of concerns in a paper: content is more important than grammar, after all. I also knew that students might not be aware of the expectations of academic writing.

What I hadn't spent much time considering was the reason why these expectations existed in the first place. Like many others before me, as my tutoring skills developed, I began to push myself harder. When a student asked a question about grammar or formatting, I started factoring in explanations that helped show why the expectations were there. Some topics, such as tone of voice, were easy. The generalized academic audience expects that they will be addressed with a certain level of formality, and so on.

Others were more difficult. Why does this need a title page? Well, because that is what your instructor has required.

*Said another way, the answer was the following: because I said so.*

I concede that this is in its own way an important lesson. Writing in the real world always has an intent. We don't write without an objective in mind; we write for somebody. Knowing how to manage

audience expectations and adhere to formatting conventions is a crucial skill in both the workplace environment and in any kind of publication. However, there are still two major problems with the "because I said so" approach.

First of all, it is demeaning. No student wants to be treated like a child who cannot comprehend the rationale behind the advice we are giving them. Second, we must keep in mind that academic writing is focused on academic writing.

Many students are right when they point out that a familiar structure like the five paragraph essay does not directly apply to most places of work. The institution that we work within has built structures preparing for more work

within that institution, including the drive for an institution to be publishing current research. This is a fine goal, but definitely not one that every student shares.

I am not the first to note that this institutionalized form of writing can be potentially dangerous. Many critical theorists have observed the close relationship that a "standard" academic paper has to the Western, wealth dominated, culture that most universities were born out of. Even through my own independent research as a TA and a tutor here at Weber State University, I have noted an overall gradual shift over time. More and more instructors seem to want to shift away from the traditional formal language that the academy requires.

*After all, it is far more interesting to read a passionate paper filled with unique rhetoric as opposed to a paper made to fit the universal dispassionate template that avoids bias by removing oneself from the paper entirely.* This observation that I make is purely anecdotal, of course, but I think it is safe to say that there is value in finding new methods to write and structure a paper.

The integration of the internet, social media, and other online formats reminds us that we are working within a field that continually changes. It is good to remember that our longest established



traditions were once on the outside of the norm. Thousands of years ago, scholars and thinkers were distrustful of committing anything to the page itself. Writing didn't follow the norms and standards of oration; writers broke from what was seen as the "standard" at the time to create something new.

This line of thinking is exactly what brought me to my "crisis" in tutoring:

### What even was my job?

If my training and my preparation work has all been done inside of the institution, how can I help students that are trying to push the boundaries of the institution? In other words, how can I give advice if my advice is geared towards the "academic standard?" This was not a lack of faith, so to speak. I still remained confident in

my abilities to tutor and advise students, but I did feel that I was in danger of invalidating students, even if by accident. What I observed, though, was a change in my thought process in any session.

I began to include more language where I would turn questions back around on the students, or I would say that there was no one way to do something, and I would often explore with the student how small changes could have large implications depending on the reader and/or the goals of the student.

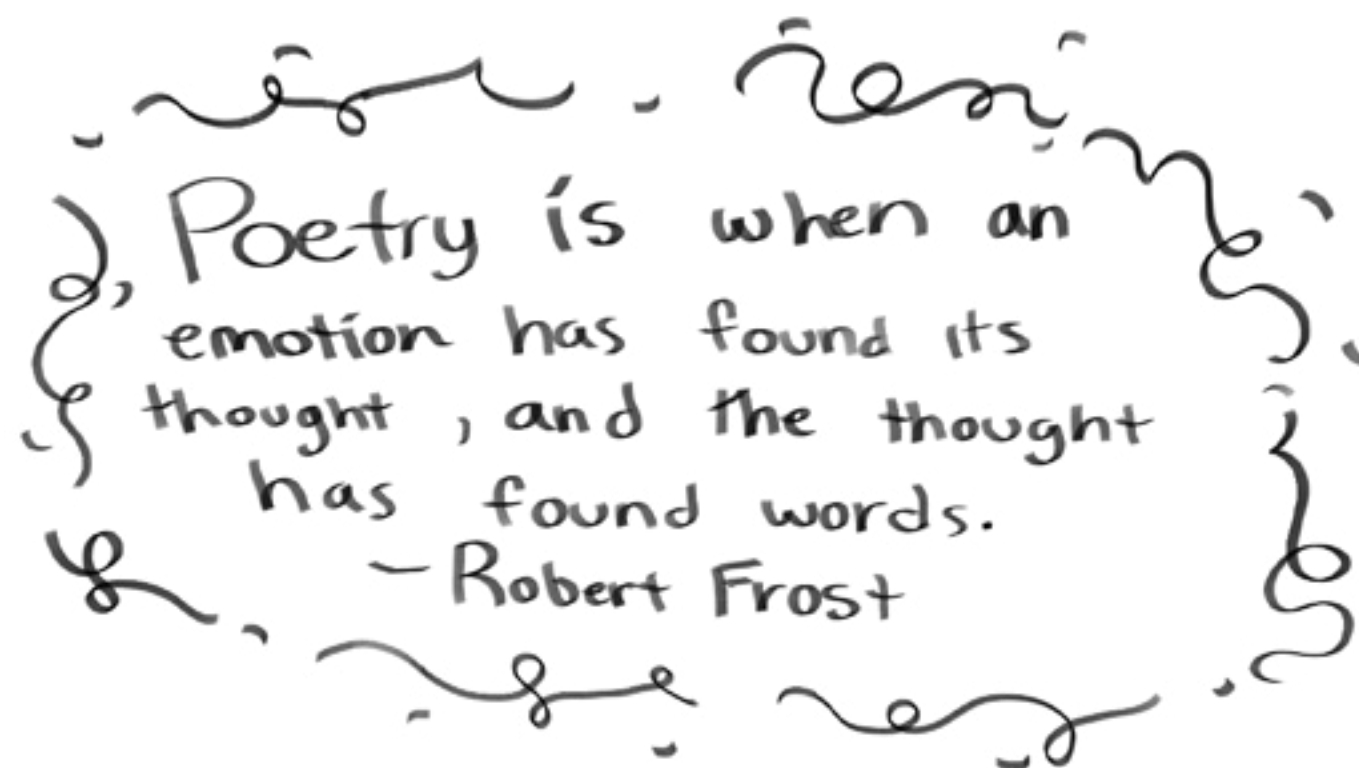
That brings me back around to the purpose of this article. My goal here is not to provide an epiphany or to showcase a brand new way of thinking about tutoring. My goal is to show how this kind of institutional awareness and student mindfulness has shaped my own approach to tutoring. I don't think that this is a perfect solution, but I have found that my most successful sessions



are the ones in which the student and I work together, coming up with new questions about writing, rather than ones where I remind them how grammar or formatting is expected in academic writing.

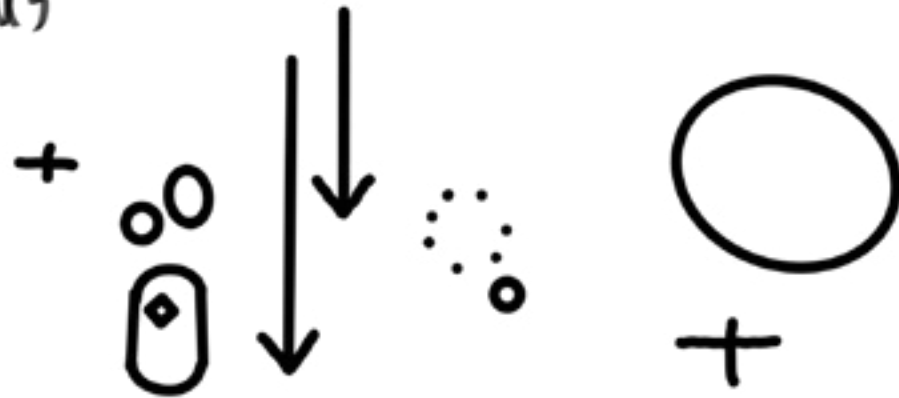
We have the tools. We know how to take on the role of the reader, and we know how to manage audience expectations. Our responses are always valid as tutors. Part of a student's expectations is that we have the knowledge necessary to navigate their course expectations. And yet, over the course of hundreds of tutoring sessions, I have found that maintaining an awareness of the institution and remaining open to new formats and style choices has helped me to become an even better reader and tutor. Because of our hard work and study as tutors, it is easy to forget that a session is meant to be a collaboration.

Sometimes, the most effective way we can respond is by asking the questions we don't know the answer to.





My magnum opus



I miss <sup>Don't we all?</sup>  
Carrie Fisher

SAME

me too! I want to join :D

Who doesn't?  
(People who  
don't know her.  
That's who)



I have a great FERPA Joke...  
But I can't tell you.

# In the Belly of a Grad Student

## A Poem

Soggy Spanikopita,  
cashmere clouds,  
and existential nausea  
swirl in my stummy  
presenting as anxiety  
for the unintentional Spartan home  
pretending to be comforting but  
is  
actually  
as tender as a  
sidewalk  
and the angst is  
potentially more pernicious than the philosophical police  
pestering me to pick a preference  
amongst all the fizzled interest and frazzled nerves

αναγαπησις is known by the presence of  
Our Lady's Tears  
because "I" have fallen out of love with  
Life.

Stuck in place amidst the pull and push  
of every day with too much to do  
and not enough time to remember why.

Maybe, if I'm lucky my πησις will become φερω  
changing the meaning from loss to revival.

αναγαπησις (ana - ga - PHEH - sis) n.

From Greek: αν (ah-n) without; αγαπη (ah-ga-phe)  
love

a loss of feelings for someone who was formerly  
loved.

αναγαφρω (ana - ga - phe - row) v.

From Greek: ανα- (ah-n-ah) re-, again; αγαπη (ah-  
ga-phe) love; φερω (phe - row)

deliver a revival, a new awakening of love



ALEXIS J. TAYLOR

Master in English  
Literature and Rhetoric  
Commas mean to pause  
but not all pause need  
commas  
I prefer to wink ;)

# Musings on Participation

## A Meditative Essay

An oft-visited, but perhaps dated topic came up in my vicinity recently: someone bemoaning “participation trophies” and their negative effect on an entire generation.

“It really explains how entitled so many Americans are,” he explained. I internally rolled my eyes. Is this still a conversation?

They were promptly put in their place (by someone else), since they were, in fact, in their 30s — the target generation who received the trophies. It was as if he were just recycling the material of others, joining in a common complaint, working on his stolen 15-year-old standup routine.

It got me thinking about how genuinely hard it can be to participate.

Showing up for stuff can be sincerely difficult sometimes.

Chunks of my adult life have been spent in isolation, hiding in my room in fear or shame. At some point it stops feeling like a choice; it becomes a habit, a hole that only gets deeper. Showing up is not at all the minimum; participation can be a mountain to climb, a downright impossible feat when all you can muster is survival, and even that can be a precarious daily struggle.

Learning to show up imperfectly, to stumble, to be present even if unprepared has been — and continues to be — the hardest lesson of my life so far. This lesson, for me, has been a gift. A shiny, beautiful gift. A trophy, even.

My mom had this saying when we lived in Alaska, that “Good things will happen if you go outside,” because it was inevitable. Weather and moody blues sometimes kept us locked in and away, but taking the steps out into the world always rewarded us with something unexpected.

Our participation trophy came in the form of a full pound of fresh-caught shrimp from a neighbor, or a live banjo show on a nearby patio, or the hushed presence of a black bear, moose, or bald eagle.

“Did you leave the house today?” my mom would ask.

Why is it so easy to forget the solution? To just make the phone call or pull on a pair of pants to walk around the block? On dark days, I forget about the light in my chest that swells at ordinary moments, humans going about their lives to their very best.

It is true that sometimes our best does not look like much. But you don't have to be talented to be acknowledged and appreciated.

So we get up. We put on pants, and we go to our neighbor's kid's recital or basketball game, and we applaud. We show up for each other, and we witness the gorgeous vulnerability of people allowing themselves to be happy and curious. Of course we should honor that.

In the end, this really isn't about excellence, or the importance of competition for our next generation of youth. But this is about bravery.

This is about showing up for your mother, neighbor, child, or friend. Being there for that stranger who looks like they need directions. This is a reminder to be present. To be a participant. This is how communities are built; it's the glue that connects us all. And like it or not, you will be rewarded. It might not be in glorious, faux-gold-plated plastic, but it could be the restorative hope you need: a light in your chest, a connection, or maybe even a bald eagle.

The Sun is  
setting, seize  
your chance before  
the night is come.



DEVON HOXER

Linguistics

Fall leaves flurry,  
eyes closed to appreciate  
the sound of applause



# The Power of Not Settling

## A Personal Essay



I believe in the power of not settling. I was at a country music concert on a date. I don't like country music. While a musician wailed about going to AA and keeping his son out of jail, I squirmed. I knew I didn't belong there. I didn't belong with my date, this "cowboy" guy.

He was tall, handsome, kind...and employed (!), but there was something missing. We never moved past small talk; there was no mental stimulation. After our third date, he proclaimed his love for me.

Before him was the emotionally unavailable brunette who said he had feelings for me but didn't want to date me. He said we could still be friends. He was exactly what I wanted in a partner though. That culminated in him telling me I met all of the emotional needs of a relationship but with none of the commitment or responsibility. That hurt.

I had a habit of settling for guys who I didn't like or who did not want me. Cowboy guy was just the latest in a long line: men who adored me but I didn't love back. I would date them, realize they weren't for me, and break their hearts.

Along with them were the emotionally unavailable guys whom I loved, who said "we can just be friends," and then went on to reap all of the benefits of a relationship at my expense.



I realized these were the same dynamics again and again, over and over. I was on some ridiculous merry-go-round.

In both instances, I was settling for less: settling for guys I don't belong with, hurting them; settling for guys who strung me along, hurting me. Sitting there at the concert, wiggling in discomfort, those guys, this music, everything, it made my skin crawl. I was done.

I told cowboy guy I just wanted to be friends. He was upset, but I was proud of myself. I was finally honest with someone and, more importantly, honest with myself. I promised myself never to settle for either of those dynamics again.

I think  
you are  
Wonderful!

aw, shucks...



REED BROWN

Sociology

A tutor's journey  
leading students to their  
own  
wisdom and writing

# He's a Fungi I Swear!

## Joke Sequence

A: Why didn't he come to the party?

B: Didn't you already ascus that question? I told you: there wasn't mushroom.

A: Oh, that's too bad; he's a pretty fungi to be around. Pretty much everyone lichen, even with how sporadic he is and all.

B: Yeah, I know. He's a real yeast on the dance floor, especially considering how mold he is.

A: Hopefully there'll be spore room at the next party. I would have rented a larger space last time but there was a hyphae.

B: Yeah. Hey, can we talk later? I've got a call from mycelium.

A: Sure. It's too bad we had to break down this conversation.



KYLE GREGORY HESS

Mathematics

When they have sessions  
I am the one who gets  
them  
tutors for their class



# Mirrored Wings

## A Fictional Short Story

Her wings buffeted the air as she strove to fly higher than the darkness creeping up around her. But right before she reached the light, claws grabbed her ankles and she was pulled back. Painfully, she hit the stone floor of the tower.

Her hope deserted her and she wept; white wings encircled her, comforting her, warm, soft, and inviting. Velvety feathers laid against her face, brushing away tears. How had this happened? She had finally found her wings. Why couldn't she leave? She remembered when she first came to the tower as more tears filled her eyes.

She had been thrown into the circular tower with no memory of the moments leading up to her imprisonment. Faces and experiences flitted across her mind, each just slightly out of grasp. A handsome face smiling at her, his green eyes sparkling with amusement.

Sprinting across a meadow filled with wildflowers, a large hand encircling hers. Hiding in a dark room before turning to see his face silently encouraging her. Everything about her past eluded her. But, certainly, someone so immersed in her life would not have left her here. Could they? She remembered rough hands pushing her into the tower and shivered.

In the beginning, there was only a mirror against the wall across from the food slot, and windows high above letting light stream in. The mirror's frame, made of dark wood, was engraved with flowers, leaves, vines, and birds. Light bounced





off of the reflective surface keeping the room bright, but doing nothing for the cold. No rug or carpet covered the floor, and her feet grew numb from the cool stone surface. Never had she imagined the suffering she would be forced to endure from a simple mirror.

Her captors fed her various bland soups and a cup of water twice a day, but refused to take any bowls, cups, or spoons back. She never saw a hand or heard a voice when they delivered despite her yelling and pleading. The dishes had grown to great heights now, crowding the small room with a ghastly stench.

Her white shift was now grey with filth, hanging from her slim body, revealing sharp corners where there were once curves. Once a river of silk, her hair was now matted and uneven.

At first, she used the mirror as a distraction. Seeing her curves, hair, and perfectly placed facial features, she complimented herself on her beauty. This perfect body must have been created through much time and practice, she thought. Running around the small space, she worked to keep her body strong and beautiful. Doing so helped fight off the loneliness that invaded her thoughts. Thinking of those green eyes, she had faith that she would be rescued soon.

But as the days and weeks passed, each a line marked on the wooden base of the mirror after each second meal, she grew bored. She made faces and started talking to the woman in the mirror. She became tired of exercising her body and wanted something more to do in her confinement. Sick of her long knotted hair, she used a broken spoon to cut it.



Her solitude grew and she longed for another being to talk to, especially the man with the green eyes. No, she thought. Not him. He hasn't come.

Months had passed, each new groove revealing the white flesh of the wooden frame of the mirror. She grew to hate the mirror and the body it portrayed. Food consumption was cut in half and her curves disappeared. Her arms, legs, hips, and face thinned. Her bones were outlined by her skin as her veins created an intricate lattice work, blue under white. She did not talk anymore, for who was there to talk to? The woman trapped in the glass did nothing but copy her and make her feel ugly, mocking her inability to free herself.

Using broken spoons, she cut her arms and legs. The cuts oozed blood and she shivered at the rush it gave her. The mirror in the room haunted her every waking moment. It taunted her with thoughts of *You are not pretty, You are imperfect, You ought to kill yourself, No one is coming.* No matter how hard she tried to ignore or hide from the mirror and the insults that came with it, she could not escape.

Those green eyes that had once given her hope now laughed at her. Already warped memories became even more twisted as these thoughts filled her mind. He hated her, wanted her to suffer, and had forgotten her.

After almost all hope was gone, the mirror began to show her wondrous things. When she knelt in front of the mirror, it showed wings sprouting from her back, reflecting the many birds etched into the frame. It awed her to see such beautiful creations spreading from her back. She wanted so desperately to have those wings to set her free.

Each day the mirror showed her a different pair of wings that could carry her to safety, away from terrible thoughts.



The blue, gossamer wings of a butterfly. The dark and chilling wings of a raven. The strong, elegant wings of a peacock.

The mirror was more of a torture for her instead of the luxury it once had been. She longed for those wings, but whenever she looked behind her, those wings never appeared.

Years passed and she had lost all faith that rescue would come. No more light streamed from windows high above her, and food hadn't come in what she supposed was days. It seemed her captors had forgotten about her.

She lay on the stone floor as if dead. Staring straight ahead, unseeing, she curled into a ball. Her legs could not hold her weight anymore. If she walked, it was as though needles were continually pushed into her feet, the pain shooting up her spine. Blood dripped from her fingers from the last time she cut herself. With a shudder, she avoided looking at the silver white scars that covered her body. The cold ground chilled her skin, sinking deep into her heart. One lone tear slid down her cheek.

Out of desperation, she laboriously raised her head to glance one last time at the wings that used to give her hope. One last look before she fell into oblivion. What faced her were the enchanting wings of a swan.

She used the strength from the sight to stand. Ignoring the pain coursing through her body, she flew up towards the windows faint light. As she neared the top, darkness crept up surrounding her. Screaming, she fought the blackness seeking to envelop her. Climbing higher and higher she yearned to be free. But it was not to be.

Talons grabbed her ankles and yanked her down. She landed with a thud and a whimper back on the cold, stone floor of the tower.

With no more tears to weep, she lay quivering, fearing that the shadows would come back. Her head pulsed as though a drum was trying to escape. Eyes shut, she tried in vain to ignore the pain spreading through her bruised, broken body.



Pale wings enfolded her, bringing comfort and peace. They invited her to rest and heal.

At first she fought the invitation, afraid that if she did she would never come back. But who would care if she left the world?

Cold hands lifted her face, making her open her eyes. Green. Bright green eyes stared back at her. She closed her eyes

and shook her head, trying to clear the murk that clouded it. Surely, this was a dream. Who would have come to save her? Was it him? The only person she could remember before being locked in the tower?

"It's okay. I've got you now."

His smooth voice soothed her. She again closed her eyes. No, no, no. This was another torture sent to destroy her last bit of hope. She tried to turn away.

"Hey, hey, hey. Look at me." His hands continued to support her. She squeezed her eyes closed even tighter. "Isla, hey. Don't you remember me?"

At the sound of her name, she opened her eyes. Again, his green eyes stared at her, horror and desperation reflected in their depths. She knew him. She knew him.

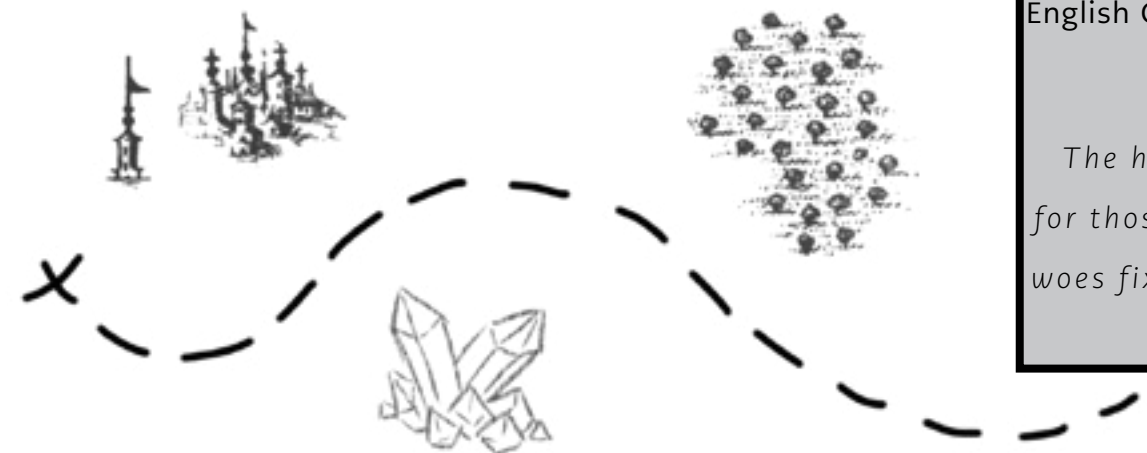
His face relaxed and his eyes filled with tears, making the green appear more clear. She placed her forehead against his and melted into his arms.

"I'm so, so sorry I didn't find you."

Sobs shook his body as he cradled her. Too many emotions filled her, numbing her, yet relief seemed to win over all the others. No more darkness. No more thoughts. No more loneliness. She was finally free.

He placed a kiss upon her brow and carried her away from the mirror and the lies it leaked. That mirror would haunt her far more than the abandonment in the tower. She tried to tell him about the terrible thing, but could only croak.

"It's alright. Rest. Everything is going to be alright." He held her closer. She sighed, finally taking his advice and slipped into sleep.



ELIZA HILL

English Creative Writing

*The heroes prepared  
for those in desperation  
woes fixed with commas*



# Confinement, Action, and Creation: An Analysis of “American Sonnet for My Past and Future Assassin”

Terrance Hayes begins his book *American Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassin* with a quote from Wanda Coleman: “bring me to where my blood runs,” which sets up the reader for a visceral and cutting experience reading this book of “**little songs.**”

This epigraph not only adds context but also works as a dedication to a friend, mentor, and inspiration. Coleman is credited with the innovation of the American sonnet as a form. She describes her poems as jazz sonnets, evoking the musicality of the sonnet form while bringing forth the ideas of improvisation and innovation from jazz music. Accordingly, an American sonnet is a

**looser, more musical and inventive variation... Having no required rhyme scheme or specific meter, the poet has freedom to innovate their own constraints within 14 lines (Write 253).**

In a historical look at the sonnet as a form, Marilyn Hacker presents that the form trends toward subject matter that mostly follows the ideals of love, beauty,

and religion (299-300). This creates an interesting dynamic when considering the title of Hayes’ book. He proclaims it a book of sonnets or ‘love poems’ to the things that kill him, both past and future, yet all the assassins within are acting in the present.

Every poem in *American Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassin* uses the same name - “**American Sonnet for My Past and Future Assassin**” - but, according to the author, the poems are not overtly intended to be interconnected, despite the repetition of lines and content throughout.

In an interview for the Poetry Magazine Podcast, Hayes stated that what ties the poems together is not the theme or content but the questions readers should ask themselves:

**“What is an American sonnet and who is the assassin?”**

In the poem found on page 11 of his book, Hayes comes the closest to revealing the answer to one of these questions when he writes:

I lock you in an American sonnet that is part prison,  
Part panic closet, a little room in a house set aflame.  
I lock you in a form that is part music box, part meat  
Grinder to separate the song of the bird from the bone.

The sonnet as a form is traditionally 14 lines with a set rhyme scheme and syllable count, whether that be the iambic pentameter (10 syllables) of a Shakespearean sonnet or hendecasyllabic verse (11 syllables) of an Italian sonnet (Hacker 298). An American sonnet releases the constraints of rhyme and meter. This departure, as Hayes highlights, makes the form both a prison, as it retains the implications of the bars of traditional form, and a panic closet set aflame where one can find comfort away from the distressing situation outside.

Hayes’ line regarding the panic room can also be read as an act of blinding. A panic room is usually sealed with only one access point, a door that can be locked from the inside or the outside. The speaker locking the door implies that the one inside is unable to exit on their own, turning the panic room into a prison. But unlike a standard prison cell with the luxury of an open wall with bars, the panic room has no other openings from which to view what goes on outside. As such, the person locked inside the panic room may or may not be aware of the danger of the fire.

In this, the reader and person locked in the room become interchangeable. Perhaps they believe they are in a place of safety, a shelter, but have instead been placed inside an oven. These lines of the poem also refer to the larger scope of living in a racialized America as a black man, being both imprisoned by, and attempting to hide or step away from, the tides of racism and oppression. The speaker of the poem is locking the object or the reader of the poem into the form, into the panic closet surrounded by flames, the way he was also locked into a situation of supposed safety without explanation of the dangers.

The contrast of violence and comfort repeats throughout the poem. Hayes starts with a prison, which represents violence and confinement, and then pivots to a place of calm when conjuring the safety of a panic room. This pivot, though, is only slight. The panic room has a dual purpose of being a place of calm, away from the situation, but it also carries the weight of fear as a panic room can also be a shelter in times of danger.



In this case, the panic room is contained within a burning house, which illustrates a frustrated sense of “safety.” This contrast continues in the next lines:

*I lock your persona in a dream-inducing sleeper hold  
While your better selves watch from the bleachers.*

The word choice here with “persona” has a depth that needs exploration. A persona is closely linked to perception and is often used to indicate a role or character being played. So, the speaker is locking the persona of the reader, not their actual self, into a sleeper hold. The turns within this line itself are interesting as it starts again, with confinement, and specifies that it is the potentially inauthentic persona that is being confined in a “dream” rather than a “nightmare,” connoting something gentle and comforting; only to then immediately return to violence with “sleeper hold.”

The immediacy of this transition indicates that the violence, instead of an act of aggression, is an act of charity or mercy because the real nightmare is the reality of a racist America, not the dream. The idea of the persona is further explored in the next lines as the objects’ “better selves” watch on from the bleachers:

*I make you both gym & crow here. As the crow  
You undergo a beautiful catharsis trapped one night  
In the shadows of the gym. As the gym, the feel of crow-  
Shit dropping to your floors is not unlike the stars  
Falling from the pep rally posters on your walls.*

The connection to the American school system contextually introduces more implied violence with the harsh realities of oppression, bullying, and school shootings. These things do not need to be explicitly said because they contribute to the reality that the speaker is trying to lock the reader away from.

The poem starts with the idea that the speaker is trapping the reader, but these lines suggest a turn as the speaker is no longer confining the reader but releasing. “*As the crow/You undergo a beautiful catharsis/ trapped one night in the shadows of the gym.*” Because the poem’s object is both the gym and the crow, they are both the prison and the imprisoned. “*I make you a box of darkness with a bird in its heart.*”

If the reader is at once the gym and the crow, the darkness and the bird, they cannot escape or hide from reality, even as the speaker tries to. “*As the gym, the feel of crow-/Shit dropping to your floors is not unlike the stars/Falling from the pep rally posters on your walls.*”

While the speaker tries to hide behind imagination, dressing reality up as stars falling from posters and evoking the image of a school dance held in that gym, moments of joy mixed in with the darkness, it does not change the “*crow shit*” reality that the reader knows to be true.

It does not extinguish the fire raging outside the door or the unspoken words that terrorize an entire population viewed only as a persona through the lens of prejudice. While doing this, his use of imagery with the music box and the songbird or the crow also invokes the history of Blackness in America with reference to Jim Crow laws, another form of oppression and restraint, and Maya Angelou’s “Caged Bird.” It is not enough to dress up reality in a sparkly dress and ignore the blood and shit on the floor.

Hayes ends the poem with an acknowledgment of what he is doing: writing a poem to cope with his own reality using a form that can be both oppressive and freeing, thus marking another turn, by name, in the poem:

*Voltas of acoustics, instinct & metaphor. It is not enough  
To love you. It is not enough to want you destroyed.*





The sonnet form he both loves and wishes to destroy was originally created for use in Italian, in the common people's tongue instead of Latin, which was the formal patrician language of the time (Hacker 298). These lines echo this sentiment of being voiced for the people, by the people. It is an aristocratic fantasy to ignore the reality of the blood and shit-caked floor in favor of yearning for the beloved, for the ideal, for the persona that Hayes is choking out.

The poem is full of activity, “I lock...I lock...I lock... I make...I make,” signaling the separation between action and creation. The poem begins with claustrophobia that urges the reader to want to break out of the prison, the panic, break out of the form into something that cannot be suggested or restrained. It is a combination of feeling both locked in and locked out. The readers live in this reality and are locked in it, not by Hayes but by their own hand. It is not enough to simply acknowledge this.

This poem is listening to what is going on and is unafraid of the paradoxes it finds. “It is not enough to love you. It is not enough to want you destroyed.” This pairing of two extremes and acknowledging the spaces, the something that exists in between them, is a resonance that echoes.

What is an American sonnet? A prison. A panic closet. A music box. A meat grinder. Who is the assassin? Both the gym and the crow, and by extension the reader of the poem.

The nature of the oppositions cannot fully contain either of these questions, and the result is a “volta of acoustics,” calling readers to listen and then enact change.



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## Appendix A:

### “American Sonnet for My Past and Future Assassin”

By Terrance Hayes

I lock you in an American sonnet that is part prison,  
Part panic closet, a little room in a house set aflame.  
I lock you in a form that is part music box, part meat  
Grinder to separate the song of the bird from the bone.  
I lock your persona in a dream-inducing sleeper hold  
While your better selves watch from the bleachers.  
I make you both gym & crow here. As the crow  
You undergo a beautiful catharsis trapped one night  
In the shadows of the gym. As the gym, the feel of crow-  
Shit dropping to your floors is not unlike the stars  
Falling from the pep rally posters on your walls.  
I make you a box of darkness with a bird in its heart.  
Voltas of acoustics, instinct & metaphor. It is not enough



ALEXIS J. TAYLOR

Master in English

Literature and Rhetoric

*Commas mean to pause*

*but not all pause need*

*commas*

*I prefer to wink ;)*

# Letters to American Women of the Twentieth Century

## A Prose Poetry Sequence

A Request for Zelda Fitzgerald,

Suspended in gleaming dreams of moneyed success and fanciful romance, I peruse cracked spines in a corner bookstore named after the Bard. Musky smells of dried ink spilt onto white pages corrode under the weight of frivolous expectations. Seeking flashes of color, witty twists of phrase, I await the tumultuous breeze of your gaiety in the pages of lost generations. But all I hear is the buzz of dying neon lights and muted jazz soured into mellow tones. Would you, the golden girl of Jazz Age flappers, salute these sedated notes?

Slipping books back onto battered bookshelves, I tread into the backroom where I finally glimpse you--pirouetting through white-washed walls. Suppressed scribbles and stolen phrases that others lifted to fuel their fantasies splatter blank walls, which guzzle them greedily amid sharp stinging alcoholic fumes. Crowned with golden hair, you twirl on rosy ballet slippers ever faster, faster, faster-- Gaining fierce momentum, limbs contorting, the air pulses with eclectic fever until, with shuddering reprieve, you strike the conclusive match.

Scrapping fragmented phrases off blackening walls, I cobble them together and send them back to you with the hope that you will save me a waltz amid swirling ash.

An Apology to Norma Jean Mortenson,  
Trapped in line at the tacky gift shop with overpriced souvenirs created solely for gullible tourists like me, I spy the frail porcelain doll suspended high above it all in glass displays. With blonde wig and sheer white dress blown askew by gutter gusts, she mimics your Marilyn. Wide eyes gaze into glazed blue eyes; I freeze at blatant accusations in vacant stares and frozen cheeks. Does your broken smile reflect in the smooth glass, or do broken shards mirror your glossy smile?

Eager to escape that creeping sense of guilt, I slip the cashier a crumpled \$50 for faded grayscale postcards of Sunset Boulevard and make a hasty flight back to sunbaked boardwalks that gleam too brightly in noonday light. American flags flutter in blustering seaside gales, threatening to come loose and rush beyond reach like stripped kites. With newfound defiance, the hollow doll with hollowed-out dreams smashes glass, lunges down, and throws jagged fishhooks into my tender heart--ripping strips of flesh, salting the meat with her tears. On the white-washed wooden promenade, we struggle until she crumples with despair.

Tenderly wrapping the doll in red and white strips, I gift her to you on a tumultuous wind, with the hope that you will unearth the courage to smash fake idols too.





A Bottle for Natalie Wood,  
 Ensnared by the spell you cast, the audience ogles the silver screen  
 with all its elusive imperfections. An actress accustomed to scripts  
 written by others, your reflection haunts the blank screen as your  
 lost voice reverberates upon darkened theatres. Yet, from water's  
 tumultuous edge, you murmur--exerting that glittering mirage  
 of perishing abruptly when far too young and with far too much  
 potential. If you could rewrite pre-written scripts, would you puncture  
 glamorous iconoclasts to speak unscripted truths left unspoken?

Exiting the silver glow of Tinseltown in all its glittering finery,  
 I creep toward the docks of Santa Catalina Island. Lapping shores  
 mimic the murmurs of rustling dresses as overlapping waves don  
 their midnight costumes. Dark secrets wash ashore as details blur  
 in murky depths. Fixated fans clamor with theories and conjure  
 suspects; rowing back and forth, to and fro, then round in circles  
 steering creaky boats cobbled from driftwood facts  
 and punctured with unsolvable holes--they search  
 for lucid clarity. Cold saltwater rushes in, flooding  
 your lungs, choking explanations you will never  
 offer, and leaving behind unresolved insularity.

Amidst the sea of impatient inquiries shrouding  
 death, I toss bottles brimming with questions  
 about life, identity, and reveries now cut adrift--  
 all in the hope that you will resurface long  
 enough to shout your peace.



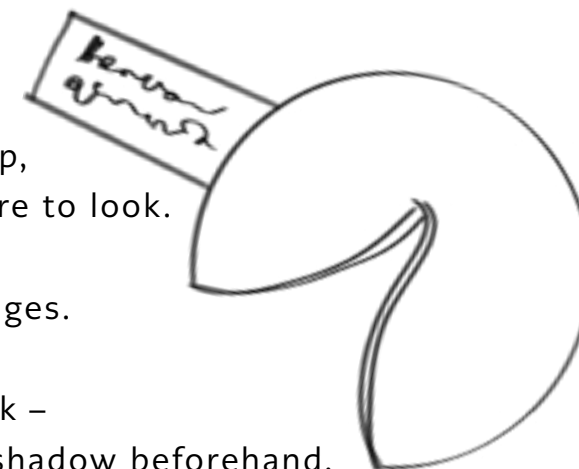
SARAH TAYLOR

Aspiring Master in English  
 Literature

*Frazzled tutees plead,  
 Rising clamor: Flow?  
 Grammar??  
 Thus, reach self-belief*

# Advice from A Fortune Cookie

## When You're a Month from Graduation and Nothing Makes Sense



To reach distant places, you have to take the first step,  
 because opportunities surround you if you know where to look.  
 So the smart thing is to prepare for the unexpected,  
 when you have at your command the wisdom of the ages.

Opportunities surround you if you know where to look –  
 be on the lookout for coming events, they cast their shadow beforehand.  
 You have at your command the wisdom of the ages.  
 You will do well to expand your horizons.

Be on the lookout for the coming events casting their  
 shadow;  
 there are many unexpected and thrilling surprises in store  
 for you–  
 you will do well to expand your horizons:  
 so try something new.

There are many unexpected and thrilling surprises in store  
 for you.  
 You are never too old to dream; dreams bring hopes.  
 Try something new,  
 and an old wish will come true.

You are never too old to dream; dreams become hopes.  
 The smart thing is to prepare for the unexpected,  
 and then an old wish will come true.  
 To reach distant places, you have to take the first step.



ALEXIS J. TAYLOR

Master in English  
 Literature and Rhetoric  
*Commas mean to pause  
 but not all pause need  
 commas  
 I prefer to wink ;)*

# Acknowledgements

As I thought about the design elements for Verbal Equinox, and our theme of connections, I immediately was reminded of the connection between people digitally. In yet another confusing and difficult year due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the bridge between people through technology has expanded further than most ever thought possible.

This is also true through our work as tutors in the Writing Center, where, over the past year, a hybrid of digital and in person tutoring has been available to students. We see student faces over a screen and papers over Google, yet we hold physical trees and smile at masked faces. We meet other tutors virtually in a Zoom room and physically in the room in Elizabeth Hall. We send chat messages to one another from long distances and pass each other papers across the desk.

Some have said that technology can be distant, and I think this is due to unfamiliarity in a digital landscape. Many people need a map to navigate the digital world, and so I included these elements on the cover and throughout the document to assist with this. In my experience at the Writing Center, there have been many more opportunities for connection than ever before, since we don't have to be in the same room, city, state, or country to build the foundations of relationships. I tried to convey this sense of both digital and physical connections by including the computer-like lines and doodles throughout the document as well as the physical drawings that can be found on our writing center white boards.

The process I took in digitizing these physical drawings and attempting to make physical the abstract thought of connection through drawing was also metaphorical of my message. The bridge between physical and digital is progressively getting more obscure, and I think this provides opportunities for ingenuity, creativity, learning, and, of course, *Connection*.

Miranda Spaulding  
Design Editor

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Alexis J. Taylor

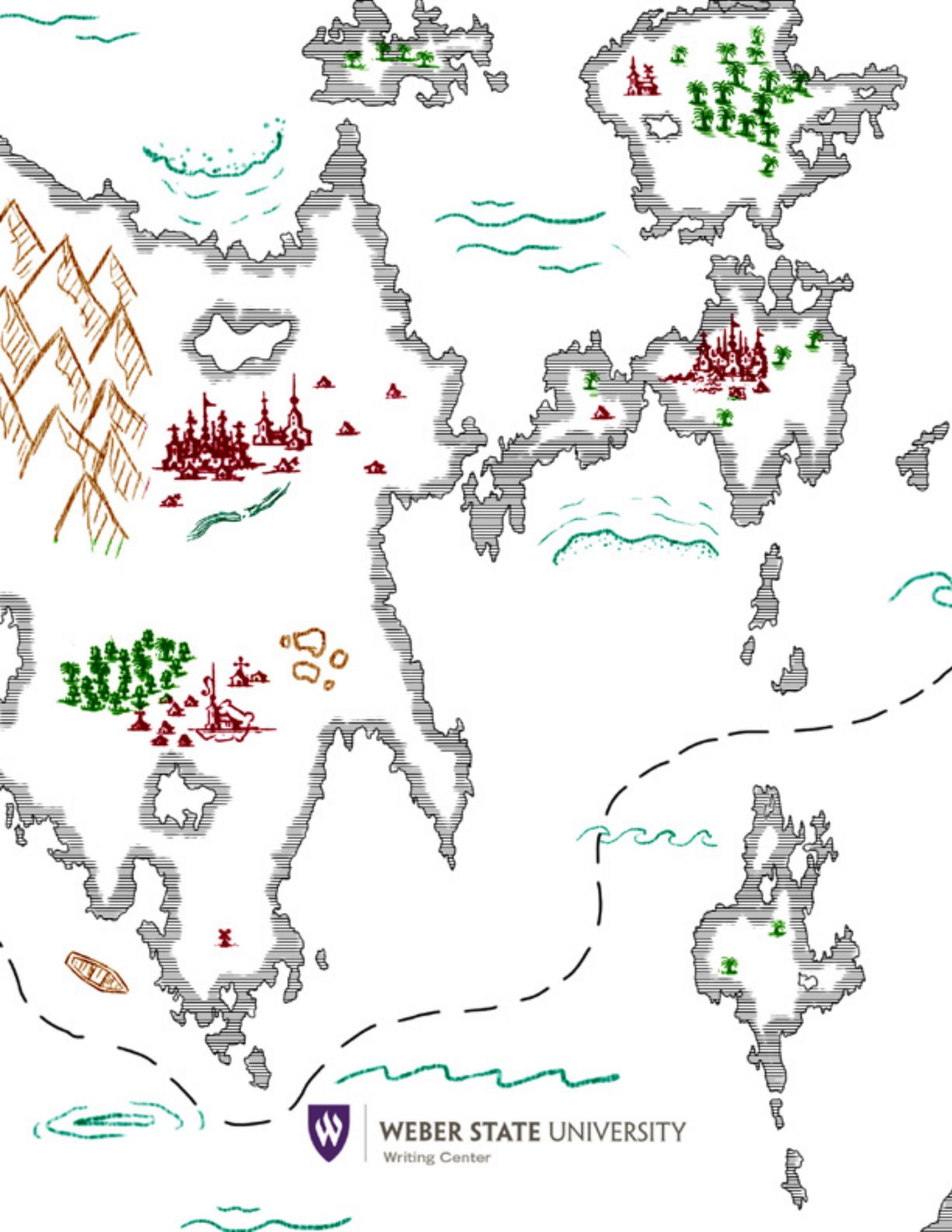
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Writing Center