

A close-up photograph of a brick wall. The bricks are in various shades of orange, red, and brown, with some showing signs of weathering and moss. A large, semi-transparent red heart shape is superimposed over the center of the wall, partially covering several bricks.

Where I'm From

Powerful Poems from Middle
and High School Students

WKCD (What Kids Can Do, Inc.) | Fall 2010

PREFACE

When we invited high school and middle school students from across the nation to explore "where they're from" in poetry or prose, we did not expect a stunning 1,200 submissions in one month.

Taking inspiration from the classic "Where I'm From" poem by George Ella Lyon, students wrote in surprising, lyrical voices about their origin points—both geographical and metaphorical. Out of this richness, we chose nine that caught our hearts to showcase as award-winners. We chose another 21 that could just as easily have been "winners"—true of so many of the poems we received.

The poems we share here are accomplished, interesting, and original. The students describe their surroundings from rural to urban, from first generation American to proud multi-generational American. Their imagery is complex, musical, and deeply felt.

As just suggested, diversity— age, geography, tone, style, and voice—was our touchstone for selecting the poems for this special collection.

Let's welcome the newest generation of American writers!

- *Barbara Cervone, Abe Louise Young, and Kathleen Cushman of WKCD*

WHAT **Kids** CAN DO

Based in Providence, R.I., WKCD (What Kids Can Do, Inc.) is an international nonprofit that supports adolescent learning in and out of school. Using the Internet, print, and broadcast media, WKCD presses before the widest audience possible a dual message: the power of what young people can accomplish when given the opportunities and supports they need and what they can contribute when we take their voices and ideas seriously. The youth who concern WKCD most are those marginalized by poverty, race, and language, aged 12 - 22.

Some know us as a website (www.whatkidscando.org) with new content every six weeks. Others know us as a grant maker that supports "powerful learning with public purpose" by youth and their adult allies across the globe. Some know us best as a book publisher: five years ago, WKCD launched its own nonprofit publishing company, Next Generation Press, which puts youth voice front and center.

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Jefferson, Georgia

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Richmond, Virginia

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Round Rock, Texas

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Combs, Kentucky

Sydney-Elise Washington, 16

Brockton High School
Brockton, Massachusetts



Brittany Aikens

age 17
Jackson County
Comprehensive High School
Jefferson, Georgia

I Am From...

I am from vegetable gardens
from fatback and green beans
I am from a single-wide on an acre of land
from sitting in front of the heater to feel the most warmth
I am from the above ground pool
the acorn tree above it
who showers us with acorns in the fall
and feeds those cute little squirrels

I am from peanut butter balls and garlic toast
from the Beverly Hillbillies and country music
I am from "wanna be's"
"I'll go tell my Momma on you's"
and Brittany Michelle's and "go get me a hickory!"
I am from Granny's Ghost stories
and staying up all night
I am from going to Granny's house
every time I heard "House Cleaning Day"

I am from Daddy looking like a grease monkey
and his smell of dirt, grease and sweat
I am from driving Daddy's truck
just to be able to smell his distinguished scent
I am from "Mommy and me" days
wasted at the mall even though we would
usually buy nothing
I am from Mommy rubbing my back to
help me fall asleep

I am from a unwealthy family
an only child family
a small family
I am from a close family
filled with love, good times and gatherings

I am from Braselton, Georgia
I am from a town that is small
but is growing like kudzu
I am from a place that I love

Annika Basch

*age 13
Lucille M. Brown Middle School
Richmond, Virginia*

Where I am From

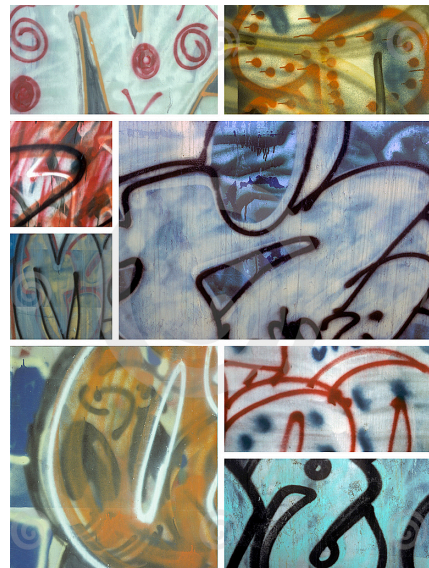
"I wish I was a turtle
And carried my home on my back"
It was eleven years ago
When I told my mom that

I'm from two different houses
With two sets of rules
Made by two sets of parents
Who knew it was cruel

However, nothing could be said
By me or by them,
That could put back together
What together they couldn't mend.

I'm from two separate houses
With two sets of rules
Made by two sets of parents
Who wished it wasn't as cruel.

And from it I emerged,
Independent and together.
I became that turtle,
And made it through the bad weather.



Emily Brunson

*age 14
Round Rock High School
Round Rock, Texas*

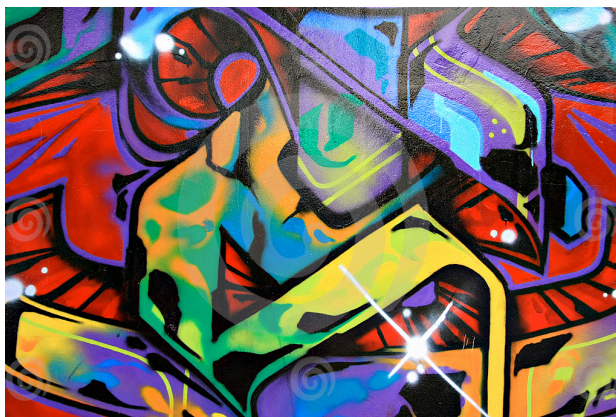
Where I'm From

I am from the Chisholm Trail,
from Oktoberfest and St. Patrick's Day.
I am from chips and salsa and Coca Cola.
I am from limestone and black berry bushes,
whose ripe berries are Mom's favorite.

I am from school bells and sirens,
from toenail polish and shoe shopping.
I'm from football and pizza,
from Bar-B-Q and cowboy hats
I'm from "You're the oldest!" and
from "You should know better!"

I am from tickle monsters and hair bows
and Crazy Mommy Cleaning Day
I am from motorcycle rides
and scary movies.
I'm from little brothers,
from pacifiers and toy cars.

A twenty-hour drive away, are memories.
Memories of Oma and Opa,
of blizzards and mountains.
Memories of Christmas cookies and the Denver Zoo.
Memories all so far away,
waiting to be found again.



Emily Bruss

*age 12
Holmes Junior High School
Cedar Falls, Iowa*

Where I am from

I am from llamas griping over cud, “Tastes like Windex.”
I am from harmonizing with a manmade beast, the vacuum.
From the smells of dog mandible.
I am from a knife in the garden.
I am from first loves and fatal fall outs
From blurry photos and brazen brothers
I am from death by spell check
From quotes from the holy book
From concern—causing stories and unsanitary station wagons
I am from snow topped mountain ranges to lake fronts frozen with snow.
I am from an artist’s dream
From secret agencies and felicifent foundations
I am from staring at starless skies
I am from a rain bow with no gold at the end
(Because it never ends)
But when it all comes down to nothing, or should I say the beginning of
Something, I am from nothing but pure love.

Brittany Michelle Daniels

*age 17
Henry Clay High School
Lexington, Kentucky*

From Whence I Came

I am from concrete.
From RapidDry and ground minerals.
I am from sweet grass.
(Pressed into the pages of my memory
from Before.)

I am from White Oak and Onyx
Shadowy shimmers spellbinding
simplistic minds.
I am from midnight fires,
mischievous eyes.
From Christ - ina
- opher

I am from rashness and obstinacy.
From "Share Yourself" or "Give It Now".
I am from a Void.
Lacking and seeking,
yet at peace with knowledge.

I am from Everywhere, and rose
from reservation stench.
From meat and bread.
I am from starting my own stories,
and learning from the ones that wound.

Caustic fire and clouding ash.
Sobs of a mother's lost records.
Sent of sulfuric ink emitted
from yellowed pictures.
Retardant chemicals producing
further damage.

I am from hopes of a brighter future.
I am from naught but love.
I will be success and no more hunger.
I will be from being Happy.
(content, complex, coordinated.)



Sakiah Dharhan

*age 14
Emeryville High School
Emeryville, California*

I am from

I am from the Qur'an from the T.V. and the remote.
I am from the rock house the safest place.
I am from the peach tree.

I am from playing soccer and volleyball
from Hanna and Mohammed.
I'm from playing at night and playing cards.
And from raising farm animals.

I am from studying and praying and fasting.
I'm from Eid.
I'm from Yemen and the valleys.

I am from the rice and the lamb.
From the day my cousin got burned.
The day he was pushed.
I am from the days we played together.
From the happy memories in my heart.

Jean Dorvil

age 16
*High School for Service and Learning
at Erasmus Hall Campus
Brooklyn, New York*

I Am From Langston Hughes' Rhythms

I am from Langston Hughes' rhythms and Ray Charles blues
I learned how to respect women from the lines of Maya Angelou
I was thought to be a strong Individual from Tupac Shakur
Got an idea of what love is from a tale by Shakespeare of an infatuated Romeo
For those who paved the way for me
From the accomplished American dream of Martin Luther King
You could say I am from black history from Malcolm X text
To a world which was created by a big bang but through the
Naked eye it remains complex

I am a poet who was injected with symbolism and similes
Learned how to be me through music notes and I was lyrically gifted from the Lord you see
He picked me out just as he carefully did Adam and Eve
He made his message thorough as can be so he said my child I will characterize you as unique
You will have a strong speech I want you to follow the poetic bloodline enlightened the weak
Ignorance in this world my child I want you to teach the Lord gave me a chance
He set me out on a war my path was filled with infidelity
I am young so I'm still trying to see where this will carry me

I am from joy, hope, and freedom a place where I give the crown
As royalty where the trees sing the tropical storm keeps my heart warm
Where the foods have various historical ethnicity
The music, the drum beats in my heart of rituals constantly
A place where I can be free your blue and red symbolize your liberty
You struggle through the past faced a lot that was put in the books of history
But earth quakes and heartbreaks can't shake us
It never shook me; I see the beauty in the ugly of my Ayiti Cheri
I am I am I am from Places, People, And Things that I can say is lovely

Kelechi Emetuche

age 14
Benjamin Franklin High School
New Orleans, Louisiana

Mama Africa

A blanket of harsh summers
Unending poverty,
Trampled beauty, raw power and lion pride.
She gave to me unyielding strength,
Natural grace,
Stubbornness of an ox.
Back full of heavy burdens,
Hands weary from work, she carried me
Over her shoulder
Across her desert filled breasts
Sorrowful rivers of tears.
Sweeping cries for her people.
No, no they are not free.
Not free of the chains of poverty and inequality.
Full of life, she cannot show it.
She remains barren.
Teeming with riches, she cannot wear it.
Her will is broken.
Battle cries, she cannot stop them
Genocides, she cannot understand them.
She flows- blood red
The pain she's in from bloodshed.
Light skin, have I.
Don't remember her bright skies.
Six years without her touch
Her smell,
Her face,
Her smile,
I'm lost.
She brings us all,
All her children together.
Customs passed down forever
Established from times before,
Ancient rites performed through generations.
Potential yet to be cut.
A raw diamond.
Mystical languages that speak of her greatness.
Hand in hand, we come along
Voices raised, we sing her song.
Mama Africa, where I belong,
Mama Africa, where I'm from.



Fionnuala Fisk

*age 12
Lucille M. Brown Middle School
Richmond, Virginia*

Who I am

I am a patient yellow dog.
I am a baby, seeing the world through naïve eyes.
I am a hard working accompanist in France.
I am old fingers on an old piano.
I am watercolor ballerinas on a blue wall.
I am an apple tree, growing in a piece of Eden.
I am big beds, big bathrooms, big families.
I am a sweet voice in a crowded world.
I am pale skin, and an elfish face.
I am nice neighbors, nice friends.
I am rice pudding and doll dresses.
I am a fuzzy beard, a full-throated laugh.
I am acceptance in another land.
I am a promise of a new life, a new job, a new hope.
I am an unspellable, unsayable name.
I am a little girl's memories.
I am Fionnuala.
I am an immigrant.

Jeremiah Grant, Jr.

age 15
Queens Gateway to Health Sciences
Secondary School
Queens Village, NY

I Am From Steel Pans and Concertos in the Band

I am from steel pans and concertos in the band
From creativity and expression working hand in hand
I am from a school located in the concrete jungle
From Trinidad patois that make tongues stumble

I am from dreamers and achievers
Reincarnating the nightmare of unbelievers
From the people who put aside ego for future heroes
Heroes seen on paper as a 1 followed by 2 zeros

I am from erasable pens that leave permanent impacts
From ideas, dogmas, and choices for how I should act
I am from the bird of paradise making its nest with the bald eagle
I am from hot, sunny, days teeming with the voices of seagulls

I am from Brer Rabbit meets Uncle Sam
From stories of old and the Holy Lamb
I am from the Gateway Arch and the golden arch of Micky's
From "May I have an order of fries with that please?"

I am from clashes of ideas, values, and traditions
From inspiration to exploration with an education
I am from fables and lectures that really mean a lot
That mean "you think you're grown but you're not"
I am from the words that leave room for thought
I am from the spicy curry in this melting pot

Jacob Huff

age 16
Heritage Christian High School
Indianapolis, Indiana

Where I'm From

I'm from dazzling constellations, hot air balloons
Leaves crackle, fire snaps,
The scent spreads for miles.
I'm from a lighted square in cornfields –
A small town among bustling suburbs.

I'm from blanket forts and backyard conspiracies,
Easter eggs in the laundry,
Ducks dead in the road.
I'm from staring at the lonely tree,
The radiator's hiss, the sun's first ray.

I'm from Ping Pong Thanksgiving,
From Spades! Pick it up! I'm going alone!
I'm from a NERF gun war
And a strawberry-flavored armistice.
I'm from a broken heater at Christmastime,
Blankets over sweatshirts over flannel,
Fireplace draws us together.

Further back, I'm from Kentucky farms,
Gravel roads curve, bend, dive.
I'm from the highest hill in Ohi' County,
Louie Peyton met Nadine,
A story told at the fireside.
I'm from acapella hymns I've never forgotten.

I pull these memories close,
Savor their warmth as I unpackage each.
A glance up, and smiling eyes meet mine;
I'm forever from my family,
Huddled by the mantel
That snowy Christmas morning.



Josie Kirton

*age 16
Promise Academy
Philadelphia, PA*

Where I'm From

Philly is where I'm from.
Broken dreams and gun points are all we know;
Momma crying 'cause her baby ain't make it.
They tell us dream big, and we'll get far,
But look what they give us:
Old ripped books and lies.
Kids learn young not to give a f*ck;
Now they're wondering what happened to the world,
A society that's supposed to be brotherly love,
But all we really get is kids getting raped,
Blood shot eyes,
Bullets that fly everywhere,
Hitting every and anyone in its path.

Alana Laanui

*age 14
Maryknoll School
Honolulu, Hawaii*

'O Hawai'i ku'u kulaiwi (Hawaii is my native land)

I am from my ancestor's foundation
Who helped to create this nation
I'm from all reaches of the earth
But I only know my place of birth
'O Hawai'i ku'u kulaiwi (Hawaii is my native land)

I am from the sand beneath my feet
And the sun's great heat
From spam Musubis on the beach
To listening what my elders teach
I ulu no ka la(u)la I ke kumu (with out our ancestors we will not be here)

I'm from aloha aunty and uncle
To welcome Mr. and Mrs.
From the beliefs of immersion and conversion
Ke kuleana o ka 'oiwe (The responsibility of the native person)
'O ka 'I ma kana 'olelo (To declare in their native tongue)

I am from a mixed plate
From Hawaii to the Philippines I think all ten of my nationalities are great
But Hawaii is where I connect to the people, the land, and myself
Ku'u home kulaiwi nei Oli' no au ina pono lani ou (I rejoice in the heavenly
blessings of you)

E Hawaii aloha e (O beloved Hawaii)

Ngor Luong

*age 13
Beebe Middle School ELL
Malden, Massachusetts*

Where I'm from

I'm from Cambodia,
which is located in Southeast Asia,
where has a lot of ancient temples which were constructed by ancient people's
hand,

I'm from Phnom Penh,
Which is the capital city of Cambodia,
Where is noisy with a lot of people and lots of transportation on the noisy road,
The spicy smell of our vegetable fish soup with spicy cheese that concentrate from
habitant's house makes my mouth water,
The taste of those delicious sweet spicy food remind me of where I come from,
The sound of people laughing happily like having the party makes Phnom Penh is
noisier,
But the bad thing was the horrible civil war, Khmer Red reign,
Which makes Cambodia was poor,

I'm from the world of illiterate world,
Where has less people who can read and write,
But luckily, I can study a lot more than other kids,

I'm from the beautiful place,
Which is like a paradise in Hawaii,
There are a lot of waterfalls, Nature Park, mountains, beach,
Where reduce people's stress,

I'm from the benign place,
Where people always smile at you and say hi to you like they're your family,
But I'm also from the criminal place,
Where people murder each other, rob, steal, and violate on the girl to feed
themselves,
Which make people scared when they walk alone at night,

I'm also from the faith world,
Where people believe in god which is Buddha,
Cambodians always go to golden monastic pagodas,
Providing food to monks and praying for their deceased relatives to penance their
sin are necessary things to do in pagodas,

I'm from the lonely world,
Where I need attention from people around,
Where I get upset easily,

I'm from Luong family,
Which is used to be happy when we were together,
Now we separate,
The noise of my brother playing like the kids playing in the playground reminds me
where I was born,
The voice of my family laughing happily and loudly like we are talking on the
microphone even you can hear when you are outside the fence,

I'm also from Boston, the city of Massachusetts,
Which is located in Eastern of United States,
Where I flew from Cambodia and landed here,
Where has a lot of different kind of people,
And where I also start my new life in here,
The sight of tall buildings amuse me,
The smell of delicious hamburger, hotdogs, and pasta make me feel weird because it's
different from Cambodia,
The noise of car, train, and bus are riding on the meandering street make Boston is
noisier,
The kindness people in Boston makes me feel confident,

I'm from Beebe School,
Which is located in beautiful Malden,
Different kind of people are involved in Beebe,
Nice people help each other that makes me feel confident to start a new school,
Good teachers help students to improve their education,
The sound of little children play in the ground sound like the noisy train station,

I'm also from the wonderful world,
Where helps me to be a good child in family, good student in school, good friend, and
a good useful citizen in my country,
Helping the world shows its beauty.

Maddie May

age 15
Parkview High School
Lilburn, Georgia

Where I'm From

I am from bonfires at the lake
where you sit atop tree stumps and occasionally get burned.
I am from the top step screech,
and the squeak of trampoline springs.
I am from the beautiful roses,
and bamboo that instantly turns your hands black.

I am from the loud screamers, the huggers,
and the people who always have your back.
I am from the 31 people in front of me,
and the MANY more that follow!
I am from grandpa's crazy songs,
and the countless times I've heard "I'm paddlin' Madeline home."

I am from the constant "Your cousin is pregnant"
with the frequent response, "which one?"
and the myriad of memories made together in St. George Island.
I am from the late nights staying up playing Nymble,
and from the immeasurable cups of coffee.

I am from cornbread, twice baked potatoes, and heart-stoppers
and eating so much you can barely breathe!
From the communal family nap after thanksgiving,
and waking up in a different place than you started.

I am from the country concerts,
where my cowgirl boots (and hat) came in handy
and the nights of grabbing a blanket and laying in the grass
while watching lasers play on a giant rock.

I am from the indescribable moments,
when I know the Lord is with me
and all the little things that melt my heart,
because I know—

I'm home.



Monae McClellan

*age 16
Eastside High School
Gainesville, Florida*

I Am From Division. I Am From Love.

I am from division
A house that doesn't look lived in
While one is in the bedroom, the other is in the kitchen
We speak to each other
But it's like no one's there to listen
And since there's no new good memories
My head fills with reminiscin'
I am from secrets
No one needs to know why cousin Lenny is in jail
No one feels like there's a reason to tell
Anything about what uncle Rudy did
Hiding that Aunt Betty has breast cancer
Or that Jenny quit law school to be a dancer
Asking questions but no one knows the answer
But I am from laughter
Argue, fight and scream then love each other the day after
All the bad things never matter
There's no hesitation or doubt
That we could ever live without
Each other
I am from responsibility
From pride, from dignity
I am from family who pushes me
To be everything that I can be
A sister who never settles for less
A father who knows my best
Both who are there for me when no one else cares
They pick me up when mommy isn't there
Affection? It's everywhere
Don't confuse the bad with my overall life
My family balances just right
I am from love

Conner Miller

*age 14
Holmes High School
Cedar Falls, Iowa*

The Darkness That Is Me

I am from cornstalks.
From the shadows of the night and the angels of the sunrise.
I'm from that first broken Fender to the shot-gun blast heard 'round the world.
I'm from the scream of a million voices and the ear shattering sound of silence.
I'm from a chariot of bones and a group of crows.
I'm from nine symbolic masks and a dead bassist.
I'm from a creative mind and not so creative parents.
I'm from the River Styx and the River Jordan.
I'm from the super-hero father turned villain.
I'm from sneakers and t-shirts.
I'm from the poems I write to the poems that write me.
I'm from a Seven Nation Army and a Master of puppets.
I'm from alpha and omega.
From a spirit world and an open door.
From the twilight zone and the other-side.
I'm from the mills and the open fields.
I'm from a city of evil with lightning flashing and thunder crackling in the distance.

Chante' Mitchell

age 14
Lucille M. Brown Middle School
Richmond, Virginia

Where I Am From You Might Ask

Where I am from
The place where gun powder is left to death

Where am I from you might ask
A place where grass is turned into brown dirt

The place where the ones they
Call "White People" never come

Where kids are found dead
The place where I am from was the
Place where I was brought up with respect

Where I am from
The place where fighting is how you solve problems
Where am I from you might ask,
The place where the thugs run their own town

Where you get high and believe
That their problems will ever
Come back, it's not true

Where I am from
The place where you hear
POP! POP! POP! POP! Sounds in the night

Where no one has a nice life
Or where the "playgrounds" are
Broken pieces of debris

Where the only tree standing is covered in branches, it
Hasn't been watered for years

Where am I from you might ask
The Projects



Annika Mulaney

age 13
Lawton Chiles Middle School
Lakeland, Florida

Multicultural Me

I am from the dusty streets of Bharat,
from crowded shops and apartments,
street vendors with ripe mangoes,
tiny cars crowded on the pavement.
I am from the land of opportunity,
always and forever,
a bald eagle flying overhead.
I am from bolts of bright fabric,
raw silk and flowing organza,
saris and *lehengas* with intricate mirror work.
I'm from oboes, flutes, and everything harmonious,
Lady Gaga and Aaron Copeland,
music that flies across pages.
I'm from piquant food,
spices like saffron, *garam masala*, and chili powder,
dals and *curries*.
I'm from America,
a name that rolls off my tongue,
speaks liberty.
I'm the granddaughter of a freedom fighter,
of someone who protested with Gandhi,
who marched silently for the independence of India.

Expressive and cultural,
I am Indian American.

Michael Reed

age 18
Chattanooga Center for the
Performing Arts

Of Time and Place

I am made of time and place,
built with Legos and polyvinyl polymers.
I am from just before the stars fell.
(Vivid, intense,
it felt like hope.)

I am the Venus Fly Trap
waiting for rainbows;
the weeping willow
whose resilient supple branches
dance in the thunderstorm.

I am nachos and cheese
and spirits reached beyond their graves

I am the get-up-and-go
and the hold-your-horses,
the quanta and the quark.

I am the seed stretched from root to sky
With a determined shove
through rich dark earth seeking illumination.

I'm Dark Matter and Big Bang,
black holes and cosmic rays
born of generations of forgotten secrets lost
to the remembered
camera my mother snapped to stop time.

In beams of light flow specks of dust
splitting rays of sunshine,
a filter of the spectrum
streams into more or less darkened places.

I am from all these fragments—
smiled before my nativity
raindrop drizzled into the ocean.

Bobby Rudahunga

age 13
Briar Meadow Charter School
Houston, Texas

Sunlight

From the sweet smell of owigali at midday
From the grueling work of Rwandese women
From “She loves you” renditions by the “whole” family
and a solo “Hey Jude” rendition by the “MAN” of the family
From swept arpeggios and scales
From a grandparent’s admiration for “ABBA”
From As I Lay Dying, Metallica, Between the Buried and Me, and
Bad Brains!

and from stories of “back home”

Section 1: “Back Home”

“He’s from a war torn third world country”
“He’s probably never had a real meal or seen a TV”
“He’s probably lived in some jungle somewhere with his tribe,

The poor thing”

Section 2: “Back Home” Part 2

On the Rwandese flag there is an ostentatious yellow sun in the middle
Sunlight is often times associated with happiness and imagery of children eating ice
cream and that was us

We worked hard for what we achieved and we figured that a little recreation
wouldn’t harm us

Well amidst the happy child consuming ice cream there is always a child who has
scraped his knee from a fall on CONCRETE

SECTION 3: “Back Home” Part 3

I’m from sunlight

A family filled with doctors, nurses, and midwives

I’m from a doctor that was adored by his patients
and came to Tulane University to study Public Health

“The poor thing”
where I’m from.

Paloma Ruiz

age 12
Keystone School
Antonio, Texas

I Choose

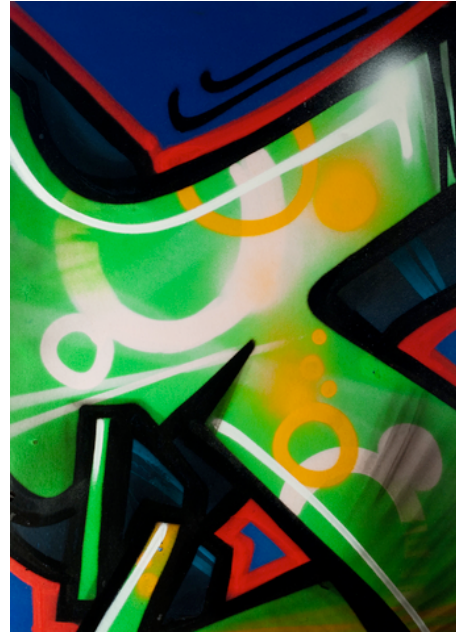
Where am I from?
How should I know?
I guess I'm from anger
Draining emotion
I guess I'm from pancakes left too long on the pan
From blue sky that melts into my family's eyes
Should I be like them?
I am from confusion

I'm from cracking pages
New books
The musky smell of grandma's newspaper
Red and blue bandanas
Wrapped over gelled hair
Green grass
Loud Spanish music
I can't understand
Sharp comments
Awkward moments

I guess I'm from pictures that leave out a face
That invisible entity that floats in the space
I'm from glass angels
Placed carefully on my shelf
From seashells and sand
Thunderstorms and whipping palm trees
Honking horns and raised voices
Ringing phones and heavy feet against a wooden floor
And back to quiet again

I don't understand
Really
Where I am from
So many places
To belong to
And I only chose one

Emptiness
White
Blank canvas
Windows
Looking Out
Out
Promising happiness



Jordyn Schara

age 15
Reedsburg Area High School
Reedsburg, Wisconsin

His Hand Brushes My Cheek

His hand brushes my cheek
as the thick smell of ethnic food
hangs heavy in my chest
I tilt my head back
and gaze wide eyed
at the windows
stacked
20, 30, 60 rows high
this is Beautiful
but this is not where I am from

I am from the trees
and the hills
rolling rolling rolling
never stop
from the
small towns
the Hey how do you do?
the Friday nights
and the Sunday mornings
I was raised
drawn up from the earth
like the corn
the corn
the corn
and the
mooooo
are they white with black spots?
or black with white?
we never could tell
I learned to read a book
learned to ride a bike
learned to tell a lie
learned to kiss a boy
learned to drive a truck
learned to live
with the same 4 girls
we were raised
drawn up from the earth
the blueprint

I look in the window
and see a reflection
a reflection of
where I am from



Quiyana Stewart

*age 15
Promise Academy
Philadelphia, PA*

where i'm from

i'm from low expectations,
star studded dreams, and
long-term disappointment;
cracked sidewalks and convincing
fast talk in front of poppy
stores and behind jungle gyms,
straightening combs
and curling irons,
walking works of art with
permanent teardrops,
cold nights at bus stops,
red eyes due to street
pharmacists,
punishments that only
virtually exist,
graffiti art of those
lost
and missed.

Cassidy Trammell

*age 12
Bethlehem School
Westville, Florida*

Where I'm From

Quiet dirt roads,
Home sweet home.
Family all around,
Unconditional love.
Baptist.
Sweet tea.
Home grown food.
Walt Disney.
Momma's cookin'.
Sittin' out back.
I pledge allegiance to the flag...

Wesley Kyle Turner

*age 12
Highland Turner Elementary School
Booneville, Kentucky*

I'm from the swampy rivers to the broken blacktop on Barwick.

I remember the smell of Wintergreen Grizzly Long cut chewing tobacco, the dirt bikes and 4x4 wheelers. This is where I am from—where Bobby's pool hall stays open 'til 1:00 a.m. and the dogs barking from the back of pickup trucks that had bumper stickers that said "I am a country boy" and "Support Coal." I am from the smell of fresh chopped wood from Wayne's wood shop. I remember the swinging bridge that went to Mammaw SallyBell's house and to a big valley, the sweet smell of J.D.'s blend smelled like pipe tobacco smoke. I am from where the smell and taste of Mammaw SallyBell's corn bread and chicken and dumplings, the sound of trucks, cars and dirt bikes and four-wheelers rev their engines. Some people think it is a bad place...but not me.



Sarah Uhlman

*age 15
Plymouth Regional High School
Ashland, New Hampshire*

Before I Could

Before I could crawl,
I could pass,
Could dribble, could shoot,
Could make all the hoops.

Before I could walk,
I could run,
Could throw, could catch,
Could hit the homerun.

Before I could speak,
I could serve,
Could pass, could set,
Could crush it into the ground.

I am from sports,
An instinct inside of me.
I knew who I'd be
Before I could breathe.

Kang Bao Vang

*age 13
Franklin Middle School
Green Bay, Wisconsin*

Hmong Memories

I am from a bath from rain,
From the dirt, and carts driving to go get water.
I am from the cart that takes people places.
From the smell of poop everywhere.

I am from the taste of a piece of watermelon
That I always carried with me
To go play with my friends,
From a place where there are monks' statues,
Where people go to find bamboo to sell.
I am from the ghost stories from my grandma.

I am from the fruit I always ate, called frog fruit.
It smells so sweet that whenever you smell it you just want to eat it.
As bumpy as a frog's back, and looks dark green.
I am from the papaya salad **that** smells bad
But tastes really good.
When you try some you won't stop eating it,
Or you will want more, except it's a little spicy.
I am from the boiling pumpkin in the pot
On the stove and still needs to be eaten
By me and my family.

I am from the games I play.
Hopscotch, hit the can, the fried chicken game.
It goes, "Whose mom is rich to buy fried chicken
To whom to eat, that person has a lot of gas."
We play Grandma and Grandpa (playing house).
I am from a game for girls drawing on dirt.
I love this game,
It's something like a race.

I am from all of these good memories.
It makes me want to go back.

Jeff Walker

age 14
A.B. Combs Elementary School
Combs, Kentucky

He Is Always There

I come from papaw
Albert from the wood
In his garbage to the
Saw dust in the air.
He is always there.

I come from watching
Papaw fish the still.
Greenish pond then cleaning
His catch. He is always there.

I come from the church
Bell's ringing to me in his
Lap, swinging. He is always there.

I come from missing his
White hair sitting in his
Favorite rocking chair.
He is always there.

I come from Reading his
Bible late at night to drinking
Coffee in the early morning light.
He is always there.

I come from thinking he gave
Me his last kiss in my heart
It's something I will always
Miss. He will always be there.



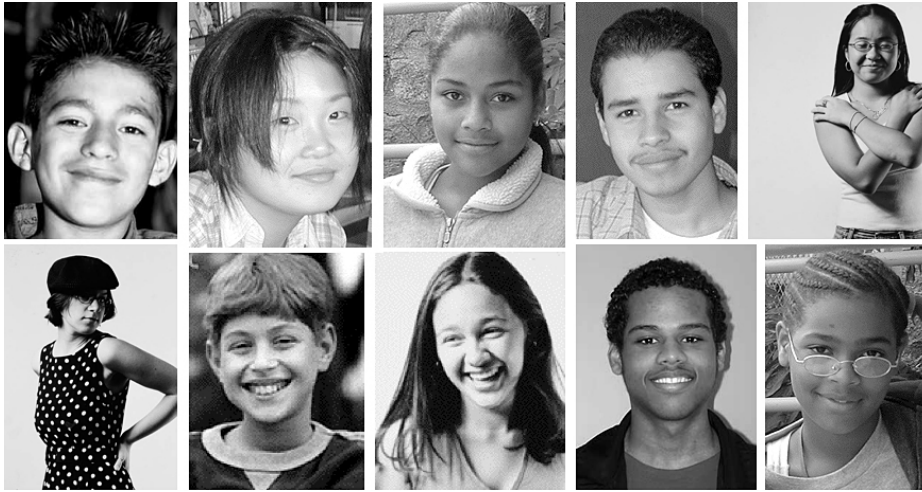
Sydney-Elise Washington

*age 16
Brockton High School
Brockton, Massachusetts*

Where I'm from

You could say I'm from the small city that relies on the government's money
The city of bullets, but you can't dodge them, because they have your name
The birthplace of legends and champions
This is my home "town"
But I am from bright sunny days playing in the backyard
Bubbles floating in the air
Blowing dandelions and dancing in the rain
I am from floors scrubbed clean with Lysol and beds made with military precision
Girl scouts and cheerleading
Making funny faces on the window
I am from the bayous and the North Saskatchewan River
The island of Jamaica and islands of Cape Verde
I am pots overflowing with cachupa and pans of beef roti
I am a tiger lily bright and vibrant but with spots of darkness in life
I am communion on first Sunday and Bible study Thursdays
Psalms 139:13-15 became my mantra
Sunday morning worship and afternoon prayer sessions
The branches of a maple stretching out to the sky is who I am
A beautiful fall and sunny spring
Desert summers and arctic winters
Book reports and vocabulary quizzes on Friday
I am from family dinners and taco night Fridays at nana's
Thanksgiving meals made for an army because we are a smaller version
I'm from a deck of cards mainly the queen of hearts side
Because I fall easily

WKCD Writing Contest Announcement: “Where I’m From”



AT WKCD, we’ve always thought that teaching and learning works best when teachers know their students well. It makes gut sense. And a great way to kick off the school year is to give students an opportunity to talk or write about themselves, to give their teachers a feel for who they are and where they’re from.

So today we’re announcing a new national writing contest, in which students across the country tell WKCD -- and the world -- “Where I’m From.” Please join us!

CONTEST GUIDELINES

Who can enter

Young people in grades 6 to 12, anywhere in the United States.

Entries

Your entry may take the form of either a poem or an essay (no longer than 400 words).

Before you write, we suggest that you read the poem “Where I’m From,” by George Ella Lyon (see below). What about this poem gives you the strongest feelings? Is there anything you can relate to in it? How do you think the author feels about where she is from?

Next, write your own “Where I’m From” poem. Rather than copying the order and form of Lyon’s poem, follow your own intuition in writing about the smells, sights, sounds, voices, people, and place you are from. Or, if poetry is not your thing, bring your life to light in an essay.

Finally, read your poem or essay aloud, to yourself or to others. What do you like best about it? What do you want to change about it? Revise your writing until it sounds true to your very own heart and voice.

To submit your entry

Email your work (as an attachment) to: info@whatkidscando.org

Deadline

October 31, 2010 (yes, Halloween)

Contest Announcement (continued)

Prize Winners

We'll announce the winning entries on our [website](#) on November 15, 2010. Winners will receive \$100 Amazon gift certificates and be published on the WKCD [website](#) – it's a great place to take a bow!

Where I'm From

by George Ella Lyon

I am from clothespins,
from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride.
I am from the dirt under the back porch.
(Black, glistening,
it tasted like beets.)
I am from the forsythia bush
the Dutch elm
whose long-gone limbs I remember
as if they were my own.

I'm from fudge and eyeglasses,
from Imogene and Alafair.
I'm from the know-it-alls
and the pass-it-ons,
from Perk up! and Pipe down!
I'm from He restoreth my soul
with a cottonball lamb
and ten verses I can say myself.

I'm from Artemus and Billie's Branch,
fried corn and strong coffee.
From the finger my grandfather lost
to the auger,
the eye my father shut to keep his sight.

Under my bed was a dress box
spilling old pictures,
a sift of lost faces
to drift beneath my dreams.
I am from those moments—
snapped before I budded--
leaf-fall from the family tree.

TEACHERS:

Visit www.whatkidscando.org and download a copy of our WKCD curriculum, "*Cultural Conversations Through Creative Writing: Supporting Students' Diverse Identities*," by Abe Louise Young.

Visit http://www.whatkidscando.org/featurestories/2010/04_you_dont_know_me/index.html and download a copy of "*You Don't Know Me Until Now*," a collection of writing and media from middle school Latino/a students in Austin, Los Angeles, and Oakland about place, identity, and culture (a collaboration between WKCD and the National Council of La Raza).