



Young Chicago Authors

2015 - 2016 Curriculum



1. HOOD PASTORAL

Note:

Pastoral poetry was traditionally intended to idealize the “innocence and simplicity” of rural life and natural landscapes, in contrast to the “corruption and evils” of city life. Nate Marshall’s work attempts to flip the pastoral tradition on its head by illustrating portraits of Chicago’s South Side.

“...my book employs a ‘hood pastoral’ aesthetic to re-establish the urban landscape as one capable of the greatest beauty...” - Nate Marshall

List:

Names of places in or around your neighborhood (excluding your home) that you visit at least once a week

Places you are excited to go to (past present future)

Places you hold in your memory

Places in Chicago you are fascinated by or really love

Places you remember or are familiar with that are problematic

Read:

Candy Store by Nate Marshall (from [Wild Hundreds](#))

 on the front porch
or in a basement kitchen
a sour pickle
fat as a child’s forearm
with a peppermint stick
stuffed in the middle
sits inside a jar.

 plastic sandwich bag jammed
with Frooties or Tootsies.

 past-prime Sour Patch Kids

or fruit chews sticky &
stubborn to the chew.

a piece of hard candy
on a ring & wrapped
in plastic ready to hand
to that neighbor's cousin
with the light eyes &
white teeth.

salt & sour chips
or the dill flavor
in the bright green bag.

fluorescent barrel juices
With foil tops.

Flamin' Hot Cheetos
turn tongues & fingers
Michael Jordan jersey
red for the rest of the day.

2 crock pots:
orange-yellow bubble of cheese sauce,
dirt brown of ground beef
ready for heat.

Fame Food and Liquor by Nate Marshall (from [Wild Hundreds](#))

we cut down 115th street for a quicker stroll
past the pastor's house, vacant lot, liquor store.

buses pointing out the hood & back. the route
every morning goes by the liquor store.

the loose Philly blunts and hard & dry. the sour mouth
washed away by a dull gulp of liquor. store

a honey bun in your fat back pocket. pray
nobody notices your awkward walk. this liquor store

sees stumbling often. out front the garish stickers fluoresce
on the wire windows like winos with liquor store

bottles. a small weapon sits behind the counter hidden by the cigarettes
& candy small enough to steal. when the liquor store

is locked up the rolling metals make the window
a pastoral, part of our natural habitat. behold the liquor store:

the sugar waters, the Ziploc bag of coins
& Nate's tongue the color of loose pennies in the liquor store

Writing prompt:

Write a pastoral poem describing one of the places from your list.

2. SENSORY MEMORY (*warm-up*)

List:

A color that carries a specific meaning to you
A typical smell outside in Chicago
A word or phrase you love to say or write
Name of a street you're familiar with
Vegetable/ fruit you don't like
Piece of advice, quote or saying that has stuck with you
Word or phrase your family likes to use or say
Name of a superhero
Favorite Chicago food
Object you carry around everyday
A word you hear often but don't know the meaning of
Favorite animal
Particular hairstyle you aspire to
A question you want to know the answer to
Clothing item popular when you were young
Your ideal weather
Your dream birthday present
Best Halloween costume you ever had

Writing prompt:

Write a poem starting with "I remember..." using as many words/phrases from your list as possible. Try to include a reference to each of the five senses.

3. WORKING CLASS ODES

List:

Jobs or "side-hustles" you've had
"Side-hustles" you appreciate
Working people in your life that you admire/appreciate (i.e. bus driver, elote man, etc.)
Things you are the creator/inventor of (words, trends, fashions, etc.)
Tools you use to create those things listed above
Things people around you have invented or created (recipes, gadgets, etc.)
Things people have created in this day & age that didn't exist before

Things about your neighborhood, outsiders are unaware about, but you love?
Specific things and places you would show visitors to your neighborhood/city
Elements of your culture that you are proud of
The "hardest" people you know
Some tangible objects that you relate to the people listed above

Read:

Ode to the Crossfader by John Murillo (*The Breakbeat Poets*)

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhQzSJ0D0z8>

Got this mixboard itch
This bassline lifted
from my father's dusty
wax Forty crates stacked
in the back of the attic
This static in the head-
Phones Hum in the blood
This deep-bass buckshot
Thump in the chest Got
Reasons and seasons
Pressed to both palms
Two coins from each
Realm This memory
Memory crossfaded and
Cued These knuckles'
Nicks and nightsweat
Rites This frantic
Abacus of scratch Got
Blood in the crates
In the chest In the dust
Field hollers to break-
Beats My father's dusty
Wax My father's dust
Got reasons Got night-
Sweats and hollers
Pressed to both palms
Breakbeats and hollers
Pressed to both palms
Static in the attic Stacked
Crates of memory Dust
Blood and memory Cross-
Faded and Bass Cross-
Faded and Cued Crossfaded
And Static Stacked hollers
Got reasons in the dust
In the chest Got seasons
In the blood In the head-
Phones' hum This deep-
Bass buckshot blood
Pressed to both palms
My father's dust Pressed
To both palms Got
Reasons and reasons
And reasons

The Tamale Man by Kevin Coval

hundreds of tamales in an igloo
cooler. they are
hot & light & dense
they are filled with queso
& peppers or pork & corn
they are delicious & delivered
to dingy bars littered
across Chicago's last late night
by THE TAMALES MAN, a hero
of sorts. unknown, unmasked
& cloaked in dimly lit dives, weaving
thru packed houses & some sad
scatterings of last calls, in a flack
jacket flannel dodging mixed
drink condensation & failing
inebriated elbows...

THE TAMALES MAN
seemingly appears
from thin air, the bust
& bustle of Western Ave.

THE TAMALES MAN
feeds the masses:
hipsters & punks
artists & waitresses
after midnight denizens
who need a break
& a stiff drink
& something
to soak it all up
for a couple
of bucks. something warm
in a corn husk, something
rolled by brown hands

THE TAMALES MAN
must have a family
some army who helps him
on the road, to wake
& resuscitate for this 2nd hustle

THE TAMALES MAN
by night, might carry
mail by day or punch
punch, punch buttons
& a clock in a factory
might live in Pilsen
and wander near the south

branch of the river near Ashland
on the weekend & watch fishermen
lure smelt

THE TAMALES MAN
lures barflies with his warm
loves them in the moment
they need the most
love, another
pour, the poor
for a couple bucks
THE TAMALES MAN
feeds the drunk
the hungry
the poor after all
the pours he is there
in the lonely of night
THE TAMALES MAN
is there

Listen:

“Shout Out” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-2hmmUMICc> Sekou Sundiata
“Note to Self” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SNLJGGQRVB8> J. Cole

Writing prompt:

Write a working class ode celebrating one person or thing from your list.

4. EGO TRIPPIN’

List:

Reasons why you are dope
Things you are good at doing
Things you are an expert in
Things you have taught other people
Compliments you’ve been given
Things people have been made of you for doing/liking/having etc.

Read:

Ego-Trippin’ by Nikki Giovanni

I was born in the Congo
I walked to the Fertile Crescent and built
The Sphinx
I designed a pyramid so tough that a star
That only glows every one hundred years falls
Into the center giving divine perfect light
I am bad

I sat on the throne
Drinking nectar with Allah
I got hot and sent an ice age to Europe
To cool my thirst
My oldest daughter is Nefertiti
The tears from my birth pains
Created the Nile
I am a beautiful woman

I gazed on the forest and burned
Out the Sahara desert
With a packet of goat's meat
And a change of clothes
I crossed it in two hours
I am a gazelle so swift
So swift you can't catch me

For a birthday present when he was three
I gave my son Hannibal an elephant
He gave me Rome for mother's day
My strength flows ever on

My son Noah built New/Ark and
I stood proudly at the helm
As we sailed on a soft summer day
I turned myself into myself and was
Jesus
Men intone my loving name
All praises All praises
I am the one who would save

I sowed diamonds in my backyard
My bowels deliver uranium
The filings from my fingernails are
Semi-precious jewels
On a trip north
I caught a cold and blew
My nose giving oil to the Arab world
I am so hip even my errors are correct
I sailed west to reach east and had to round off
The earth as I went
The hair from my head thinned and gold was laid
Across three continents

I am so perfect so divine so ethereal so surreal
I cannot be comprehended except by my permission

I mean...I...can fly
Like a bird in the sky

Writing Prompt:

Use your list to write a poem about how dope you are, celebrating your strengths as well as your flaws.

5. RETABLO COLLAGES (by Krista Franklin)

Note: A *retablo* in Mexican folk art is a devotional painting meant to be a physical representation of a holy or saintly being. Retablo collages can be dedicated to a person no longer with you whose memory you want to hold on to.

FreeWrite: At the top of your paper write the word “offering”. Write the name of one significant person in your life who has passed, or is no longer in your life at the top of your paper as well.

List:

Things that you associate with the one significant person you wrote down (things this person loved, hated, memories, places/objects that remind you of them, etc.)

Read:

Invocation by Aracelis Girmay

There is a woman with a bird’s nose &, in each ear, four or seven holes,
Mother, you, come, & the father who is a house,
& all the mountains in little towns,
clarinets, violins, girls with yellow dresses,
come, Chicago, jump the country, come,
Jazzy & your crooked teeth, Lupita.
Come orange blossoms & news,
good luck, juke box, come photobooths, freight trains.

Come,
Abraham
Hannah
Zewdit
Tadesse
Tiny
Cisco
Granddaddy, come,

& all the roots of trees & flowers,
street corners & mango stands,
piragua man, come,
silver tooth, back rooms, 12 o’clock,
come cloves & beans & frankincense,
baseball diamond, the dirt track, come Pharoah & Mary & Nascimento’s band,

come beds, whole lakes & keeping time, come holy ghost & silverfish,
come
bird, bird, bird,
& ballet shoes in the church’s basement, come candle & maroon,

cilantro, green, come braid & fist of afro-pick, come tender head & honey hive,
quick knife, domino, come bomba, come, fish hook, Inglewood, March, old moon, come
busted piano, ivory key,
come, cousin, come alive,

come, time,
uprock, beach crab, cliff,
come glass eye, nazela, sails,
brother, sisters,
come magnum locks & world of things, sphinx,

desert bottles, indigo, maps,
Sojourner, Lolita, Albizu come,
Gwendolyn, Victor & Lorraine, come Neptune, Hector Lavoe, Haragu, come,
Adisogdo, come free,
come hips, come foot, come rattlesnake, Jupiter, love come,
cardamom & reeds, come wild,
spells, lightning, frogs & rain,
come loss, come teeth, come crows & kites,
conga, conga, & kettle drums,
come holy, holy parade of dirt, come
mis muertos who dance in procession
while tubas play, come.

& a god who is a girl, marigolds in her hair, see her blow,
into my mouth, a wind of copal that is smoking, smoking.

& on it, come, ride
into it, come, family,
& ride through the rooms of my house. Into my veins & brain, come,
the lace of nerves—oh how
you make
me heaven.

Materials:

Small/large white poster pap
Colored paper
Acrylic paint
Scissors
Paper plates/cups
Paint brushes
Glue stick/tape
X-acto knife
Magazines/Newspapers

Prompt:

Make a collage piece, similar to a *retablo*, that visually honors the person you chose.

6. GAME POEMS

List:

Games you/your family/friends like to play
Games you played when you were younger

Choose one of these games:

Names of people you played this game with
Names of people who taught you how to play this game
Objects/materials necessary to play this game.
Reasons why this game is significant to you

Read:

Poker by Paul Farley

You're told this deck was found
in some shattered bothy or croft
north of the Great Glen,
missing its six of diamonds,
shuffled and dealt to a soft
pliancy, greased with lanolin

and you're told this deck lived behind
the bar in a barracks town
and came out to play most nights,
cut between the Falklands
and Iraq, its spring long gone,
dark-edged with mammal sweat

and you're told this deck is the one
recovered from a halfway house
where fatty stalactites
grew in a microwave oven,
where a bottle of Famous Grouse
was brandished in a fight

and it might be a pack of lies
or it might be a sleight of hand,
and you can't tell which is a bluff
because words are a good disguise
for holding nothing. I've found
that nothing is more than enough.

We Should Make a Documentary About Spades by Terrance Hayes ([How to Be Drawn](#))

And here is all we'll need: a card deck, quartets of sun people
Of the sort found in black college dormitories, some vintage
Music, indiscriminate spirits, fried chicken, some paper,

A writing utensil, and a bottomless Saturday. We should explore
The origins of a derogatory word like "Spade" as well as the word
For feeling alone in polite company. And also the implications

Of calling someone who is not your brother or sister,

Brother or Sister. So little is known of our past, we can imagine
Damn near anything. When I say maybe slaves held Spades
Tournaments on the anti-cruise ships bound for the colonies,
You say when our ancestors were cooped on those ships

They were not yet slaves. Our groundbreaking film should begin
With a low lit den in the Deep South and the deep fried voice
Of somebody's grandmother holding smoke in her mouth
As she says, "The 2 of Diamonds trumps the 2 of Spades

In my house." And at some point someone should tell the story
Where Jesus and the devil are Spades partners traveling
The juke joints of the 1930s. We could interview your uncle Junior
And definitely my skinny cousin Mary and any black man

Sitting at a card table wearing shades. Who do you suppose
Would win if Booker T and MLK were matched against Dubois
And Malcolm X in a game of Spades? You say don't talk
Across the table. Pay attention to the suits being played.

The object of the game is to communicate invisibly
With your teammate. I should concentrate. Do you suppose
We are here because we are lonely in some acute diasporafied
Way? This should be explored in our film about Spades.

Because it is one of the ways I am still learning what it is
To be black, tonight I am ready to master Spades. Four players
Bid a number of books. Each team adds the bids
Of the two partners, and the total is the number of books

That team must try to win. Is that not right? This is a game
That tests the boundary between mathematics and magic,
If you ask me. A bid must be intuitive like the itchiness
Of the your upper lip before you sip strange whiskey.

My mother did not drink, which is how I knew something
Was wrong with her, but she held a dry spot at the table
When couples came to play. It's a scene from my history,
But this probably should not be mentioned in our documentary

About Spades. "Renege" is akin to the word for the shame
You feel watching someone else's humiliation. Slapping
A card down must be as dramatic as hitting the face of a drum
With your palm not hitting the face of a drum with a drumstick.

You say there may be the sort of outrage induced
By liquor, trash talk and poor strategy, but it will fade
The way a watermark left on a table by a cold glass fades.

I suspect winning this sort of game makes you feel godly.

I'm good and ready for whoever we're playing
Against tonight. I am trying to imagine our enemy.
I know you are not my enemy. You say there are no enemies
In Spades. Spades is a game our enemies do not play.

Prompt:

Choose an aspect of the game (or the game overall) and write a history for it.

~or~

Write a documentary poem about your favorite game.

7. HEX POEMS

List:

People you've had an argument/disagreement with over the last year
Famous people you don't fuck with
People you feel are the opposite of you
Foods you find disgusting and horrific
Names of people you would like to like you more.
Names of people who you feel misunderstand you
Annoying things/pet peeves that happen to you

Read:

wishes for sons by Lucille Clifton

i wish them cramps.
i wish them a strange town
and the last tampon.
I wish them no 7-11.

i wish them one week early
and wearing a white skirt.
i wish them one week late.

later i wish them hot flashes
and clots like you
wouldn't believe. let the
flashes come when they
meet someone special.
let the clots come
when they want to.

let them think they have accepted
arrogance in the universe,
then bring them to gynecologists

not unlike themselves.

Listen:

Chance's verse in **Baby Blue** by Action Brownson

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bVP_w1rQweE

Prompt:

Using items from your list for inspiration, write a spell/curse for someone/something from your list.

8. FOOD POEMS

List:

Favorite foods from your childhood.

Least favorite childhood foods.

Guilty pleasure snacks.

Food/meal you have a negative memory of.

Foods you can't eat

Favorite candies

Food you associate with specific people

Read:

Butter by Elizabeth Alexander

My mother loves butter more than I do,
more than anyone. She pulls chunks off
the stick and eats it plain, explaining
cream spun around into butter! Growing up
we ate turkey cutlets sauteed in lemon
and butter, butter and cheese on green noodles,
butter melting in small pools in the hearts
of Yorkshire puddings, butter better
than gravy staining white rice yellow,
butter glazing corn in slipping squares,
butter the lava in white volcanoes
of hominy grits, butter softening
in a white bowl to be creamed with white
sugar, butter disappearing into
whipped sweet potatoes, with pineapple,
butter melted and curdy to pour
over pancakes, butter licked off the plate
with warm Alaga syrup. When I picture
the good old days I am grinning greasy
with my brother, having watched the tiger
chase his tail and turn to butter. We are
Mumbo and Jumbo's children despite
historical revision, despite
our parent's efforts, glowing from the inside

out, one hundred megawatts of butter.

Tater Tot Hot-Dish by Hieu Minh Nguyen

The year my family discovered finger-food recipes, they replaced the roast duck with a turkey, the rice became a platter of cheese and crackers, none of us complained. We all hated the way the fish sauce made our breath smell. When the women started lightening their hair, we blamed it on the sun. When Emily showed up with blonde highlights and an ivory boyfriend we all started talking about mixed babies. Overjoyed with the possibility of blue eyes in the family photo. That year I started misspelling my last name, started reshaping myself to have a more phonetic face. Vietnam became a place our family pitied, a thirsty rat with hair too dark and a scowl too thick. That year a porcelain Jesus made its way onto the bookshelf. We stopped going to temple and found ourselves a church. I took my shoes off outside of the cathedral out of habit and my mother hid her embarrassed tan face in a cotton scarf. When she closed her eyes and bowed her head to prayers she couldn't understand, I left religion in the back seat of our new-used Ford Focus. That was the year I stopped praying, and started thinking in English.

Prompt:

Write a piece about one of the foods on your list and it's relation to you/your family/your culture/your history.

9. REMIX POEMS

List:

Texts you love (ie: lyrics, poems, prayers, quotes, novels)

Texts in this country we hold in common (ie: The Preamble, radio hit song lyrics, famous quotes, etc.)

Read/Listen:

PUSSY MONSTER by Franny Choi

from Lil' Wayne's "Pussy Monster," rearranged in order of frequency.

video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sunQ9UxZsZ8>

for flu food bowl stood no more soup remove spoon drink juice salt pepper heard well cool job
blow bet mic check how don't have clue but find show tell lift top lip smell swallow spit every
time goes get call Dracula vacuum catfish fish cat tuna smack flip spatula lil runnin so tackle
baby be worm apple butt go backin front throw black Acura been this game actress told action

Prompt:

Using one or more texts on your list, create a “remix” or “mash-up” with your own artistic twist.

10. THE COOL

List:

People in your life you think are cool.
Groups of people in your life you think are cool.
Where did you get your idea of “cool” from?

Read:

How to Triumph Like a Girl by Ada Limon

I like the lady horses best,
how they make it all look easy,
like running 40 miles per hour
is as fun as taking a nap, or grass.
I like their lady horse swagger,
after winning. Ears up, girls, ears up!
But mainly, let’s be honest, I like
that they’re ladies. As if this big
dangerous animal is also a part of me,
that somewhere inside the delicate
skin of my body, there pumps
an 8-pound female horse heart,
giant with power, heavy with blood.
Don’t you want to believe it?
Don’t you want to tug my shirt and see
the huge beating genius machine
that thinks, no, it knows,
it’s going to come in first.

Player by Roger Robinson (from *Suitcase*)

We dance demurely in our seats by Patricia Smith (from *Gotta Go Gotta Flow* p. 53)

Prompt:

Write a tribute poem to someone from your list who you think is cool.

~or~

Write a poem telling the history of how you got your cool.

11. CHILDHOOD POEMS

List:

Chores and responsibilities you had growing up
Places you didn't like being brought to with your parents/guardians
Places you liked to go to as a kid
Sayings/advice your parent/elders use to tell you growing up
Things you wished you had when you were younger

Prized possessions when you were young
Anything you got in trouble/disciplined for
Things you loved to eat when you were young

Read/Watch/Listen:

Dining Room by G Yamazawa

video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FDg73yG_Z6

(hook)

mama waiting tables
papa in the kitchen
Emily was hostess
I was doing dishes
we was tryna make a living on the come up
I'm a stay true no matter what I do
raised in a family serving food
jus made sure I wasn't in the dining room

(verse 1)

mama always had a dream that she could speak English
translating in America, 50 state of mind
never had the capital to be a star in her field ended up putting fish on a clean dish

never felt so defeated,
how did she even interpret her feelings
her mama was dancing, her sister was singing,
her husband was hopeful,
mayumi was dreaming

I seen her, balance ten plates with five fingers
what a talent, to be openly sharin your culture with strangers
slowly but surely she showed me the way of the shogun is patience

came to durham set up shop in the city
serving that maki, unagi, nigiri,
sipping that sake asahi Kirin we be thankin the food that we eat.

(hook)

that dining room, in that dining room,
stayed away from that dining room
"Georgie kun, what are you doing? get out the dining room"
"how many times I gotta tell you? stay outta that dining room"
"see all these customers eyeing you? get outta that dining room"

(verse 2)

papa always had a dream but I never really knew
he couldn't remember so I never had clue
never had a friend, no ace bunkun
I guess it got left in his home town too

now he had to take job that he didn't really choose
had a strong voice that he couldn't really use
that's why immigrants be cooking that food
it's the only way they communicate with you

I seen him put a knife through a sea of dead dreams
oh but the life force that the dead brings
Slave to the work wanna be set free
make me wonder would he reset me

is it rightful to think he'd rewrite his own life
knowing his child will document this
but I'll write and I'll fight for the time
that his family was calling him with his own life on the line

wanna save you.
wanna thank you
for giving me more than a plate full
your opinion means more than grade school
you told me the reason you sacrificed all of the things that you loved even if you were made to
to show me the strength through only one man can achieve what the greats do
if you love what you do and you're faithful
my failures could never try to blame you
all of my victories claim you
we used to have a wishing well and the wishes never came through but I guess our dreams
came true

(hook)

Nikki-Rosa by Nikki Giovanni

childhood remembrances are always a drag
if you're Black
you always remember things like living in Woodlawn
with no inside toilet
and if you become famous or something
they never talk about how happy you were to have
your mother
all to yourself and
how good the water felt when you got your bath
from one of those
big tubs that folk in Chicago barbecue in
and somehow when you talk about home
it never gets across how much you
understood their feelings
as the whole family attended meetings about Hollydale
and even though you remember
your biographers never understand
your father's pain as he sells his stock

and another dream goes
And though you're poor it isn't poverty that
concerns you
and though they fought a lot
it isn't your father's drinking that makes any difference
but only that everybody is together and you
and your sister have happy birthdays and very good
Christmases
and I really hope no white person ever has cause
to write about me
because they never understand
Black love is Black wealth and they'll
probably talk about my hard childhood
and never understand that
all the while I was quite happy

Prompt:

Write a portrait of your childhood the way you would want it to be remembered.

12. RELATIONSHIP CHRONICLE

List:

People/things that historically and/or presently give you a hard time.
People/things that have hurt you, your family, your ancestors.
People/things that have broken your heart.
Hard lessons you still have to learn about life.
Things this week that disappointed you.

Read:

Matt by Morgan Parker

*For all intents and purposes and because the rule applies more often than it doesn't, every white man or boy who has entered and fallen away from my particular moderate life has been called Matt. Not Dan. Rarely Ben. Never Matthew. Matt smokes unfiltered Pall Malls because Kurt Vonnegut did. We talk on Myspace because he goes to a different high school. Matt's in love with someone else but I can tell he's still interested in me. Matt and his girlfriend aren't really together. Matt doesn't have a condom so we can't. Matt also doesn't have a condom so we can't. Matt loves Modest Mouse. Matt loves Kanye. He loves whiskey. He brings a flask to the park. He tells me I'm beautiful. He likes me. He follows me into the bathroom where I once found a bag of coke. I tip sideways onto the tile trying to steady myself on top of him while his legs are spread on the toilet lid. I say what about you and Anna. He says hold your ankles. I made Matt a really good mix cd. Matt's writing a novel. Matt's also writing a novel. Matt says I'm a really good kisser. My friends say I'm too good for Matt. Matt loves his Mom. Matt's moving to Berlin. Matt's moving to California. Matt's quitting smoking again. Matt rolls his own cigarettes. Matt has depression. He listens to sad songs. Matt wants a big family. He seems like he would be a good dad. His family is so white. His favorite novelists are white. His ex-girlfriends are white. He said he would call me. His ex-girlfriends are really skinny. He has this thing where he seems like he doesn't care about anything. Matt's in love with someone else. He thought I was way older than him. He got a new tattoo. He has bad dreams. I miss him. He loves foreign movies. He's stoned all the time. He pulls me into another room. He has a beard and he also has a beard. He kisses me in the other room. He loves my dog. He flirts with me all the time, I think just for fun. Oh, Matt. He knows he's a white man but doesn't think of himself as a white man. He doesn't know what to do with his life. He floats. He is young. He can afford to be cool. He wears a lot of flannel. We're just friends. He's nervous about commitment. He's nervous in the elevator when he touches the small of my back. He's nervous on the roof. I'm nervous taking his hand because people can see us. His roommate walks in on us, then gives us shots of gin we all sip in silence. After that we smoke on his fire escape and make out. We smoke in front of the bar and make out. We make out on an empty subway train, my back slips around on the hard plastic seat. He pays for my brunch. He texts me all the time even at the airport. He's breaking up with his girlfriend. He and his friends are drunk in someone's apartment in Queens, what am I up to? He hates his job but he's totally a genius. He lost his phone so he has a new number. He hates his job and what he really wants to do is make art and be happy. He needs to live abroad for a while. He *used to be really dumb*. He swats his hair from his forehead and says of course he will call. I always ask but I'm going to stop asking. I'm nervous he doesn't understand. He didn't grow up with many Black people. He knows he is part of the problem. He just believes in love and knowledge. Matt, Matt, Matt, Matt. Each one more beautiful than the last. Each one more with more intricate ennui. I could never love him. He floats. I can't stop loving him. Matt knows the bartender. Matt studied comparative literature. He still loves his ex, I just know it. He says I like talking to you. He says watch your head as I ride him in his dorm room bunk bed. He's so sorry he didn't call, it's just that things have been busy and weird. Matt and I sneak out of a movie to hook up in his car. He is afraid of me. Matt and I are hanging out this week I think, to watch movies or something. I guess, maybe. He's never met anyone like me. Things are just super casual with us. Neither of us are looking for a relationship. Matt loves relationships. He slept with my friend. I can't tell if he's into me because I'm Black or because I'm not that Black and either way I feel bad. I feel it in my stomach's basement: Matt can't want me. I am not forever. Matt has kissed me hundreds of times and he kissed my ancestors too. He held them down and kissed them real good. He was young and he could afford it. When he touched them, they always smiled, almost as if it had been rehearsed.*

Prompt:

Create a piece chronicling the relationship between you/your people and one of the people/things from your list. Chronicle the the recurring events in your personal life and/or your people's history.

13. CHICAGO NICKNAMES (*warm-up*)

Read:

List of nicknames for Chicago via Wikipedia

- "City by the Lake" – Used as early as the 1890s.
- "City in a Garden" – English translation of the Latin motto on the city seal: "Urbs in Horto"
- "Great Commercial Tree" – From the State Anthem of Illinois
- "Heart of America" – Chicago is one of the largest transportation centers in America and its location is near the center of the United States.
- "My Kind of Town" – According to the song "My Kind of Town (Chicago Is)" (music by Jimmy Van Heusen, words by Sammy Cahn, 1964) popularized by Frank Sinatra. (Originally from the film, Robin and the Seven Hoods, about a fictional popular Chicago gangster).
- "The City Beautiful" – A reference to the reform movement sparked by the World's Columbian Exposition, used by Hawk Harrelson when the Chicago White Sox open a game at U.S. Cellular Field
- "Chi-beria" – A play on Siberia, a nickname largely used during the 2014 North American Cold Wave.

Discuss:

What nicknames are missing from this list?

Prompt: Write a piece renaming Chicago (once or 1000 ways) on your own terms.

14. REWRITING POP CULTURE

List:

Fictional characters you identify with (from movies, video games, TV shows, books, comics, fairy tales, etc.)

Fictional places you wish actually existed (from movies, video games, TV shows, books, comics, fairy tales, etc.)

Read:

Khaleesi Says by Leah Umansky
Game of Thrones

In this story, she is fire-born:
knee-deep in the shuddering world.

In this story, she knows no fear,
for what is fractured is a near-bitten star,
a false-bearing tree,
or a dishonest wind.

In this story, fear is a house gone dry.
Fear is not being a woman.

I'm no ordinary woman, she says.
My dreams come true.

And she says and she is
and I say, yes, give me that.

Blade, The Daywalker by Tim Siebles

Like a stake
in my heart: this life—

the seen,
the unseen—the ones

who look in the mirror
and find nothing

but innocence though they stand
in blood up to their knees.

You see them: shadows
not shadows, people who seem

to be people, You don't
believe me? I watch

their news, drink coffee
in their chains.

There's no place
they haven't touched:

it's almost like I can't
wake up, like I'm living

in a movie, a kind of dream:
action-packed thriller.

I never
dreamed this

hunger in my veins, this
mind that cannot sleep: why

do I whet this blade,
when they will not die.

Watch:

Negrotown by Key & Peele

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rg58d8opQKA>

Prompt:

Rewrite a pop culture character that has the same identity trait as you

~or~

Imagine your own fictional place as you would want it to exist.

15. GHAZALS

Note: A *ghazal* is a traditional Middle Eastern form of poetry that uses a repeated end rhyme.

List:

Words you often use in your poems or in daily conversation

Words you like the sound of

People who are important to you, choose one:

Objects/words/phrases that remind you of this person

Read:

Broken Ghazal in the Voice of my brother Jacob by Aaron Samuels

Irrefutable fact / my brother is black jewish

Kink hair & a wide nose / that's gotta be black, jewish

He said look in the mirror / naked / if it ain't black—jewish

If we don't do it to ourselves / first / then they do it to us

Said he loves countin' stacks / is that black? / jewish?

Said we loves eating chicken cause we black-jewish!

Said, you gotta keep it real / listen to black music

If you wanna keep your teeth / you ain't allowed to act jewish

And that's jewish / Night of the broken glass jewish

They'll beat your face in with a bat / until its black. jewish

They raped your great grandma, and that's a fact, jewish

Say a prayer for the secrets your family keeps, Kaddish

See Aaron, you run / but I learned to attack: jewish

In order to survive, you gotta be black, stupid

Let 'em tattoo my arm, that's how I act Jewish

That's how I be black / but that's not what you did

Got yourself a "good job," where nobody's black / jewish

Cut the slang off your tongue / it's too black; jewish

And, you never came home / Aaron / where it's black-jewish

And not coming home / is black

jewish

Ghazal for my sister by Angel Nafis

a little darker than me/ love by the mass sister
pale birthmark on your neck/ with so much sass sister
almost my reflection/ through mirrored glass sister
heels & creased pants/ on the go/ niggas harass my sister
twin bodies/ forked path/ a year estranged/ alas sister
my world is hers if she knew she my last sister
worth unmeasured/ though neither of us can pass sister
white boyfriend curse between your eyes/ but you got class sister
I hold my breath & tongue
pretend I don't see, "Sonny's Girl"
tattooed on your ass sister
he cleans his boots on your dreams/ he is an ass sister
(the) black freckle on your nose/ could teach a class sister
I'ma miss you when I go
but return
religious
like mass, sister.

Prompt:

Write a ghazal for someone or something in your life that is important to you.