if
teaching is listening

learning is telling

Deborah Meier
lunch ladies, teachers,
crossing guards, principals, kids
all are teachers
comets colliding
black chaotic universe
surrounded by fence
jonny 11 years old.

eyes with fireball retinas and steel pupils
arms like the joists of skyscrapers
legs faster than lightning
chest of a Rhino with bullet-proof plating
hair a dizzying labyrinth of questions
stomach battling nasty breakfast

Will not pass the test.
shivanghi planted a seed today
she feels it growing
her lily mind
through knotted hair
records lost memories
i trudged through piles of leaves
on my way to school observation
i like to pretend i am leaf bulldozer

i wore my name tag and fine clothes and bugs
lumbering around the lunch room

i don't ride a scooter or truck
as table 3 queried

lady bugs everywhere
on my pants, the windows, the air
children were fascinated
they seemed to relate
being so small

shaquanda is in love with a fourth grader

the paid help with neon orange sashes
- which i think is appropriate -
a giant orange sash should drape every school yard
CAUTION: children test-driving the world

the paid help tried to keep the kids
away from the ladybugs
but they were everywhere

it is katie's birthday tomorrow
pink slips were instituted for the first
time today giving the sash
more authority - stainless steel whistle,
band-aid bulging fanny pack, sunglasses
and the pink slip

used to make more distance between
a 2 ½ foot kid
A 5 ½ foot adult
rules it seems, are passed down by height

i stand at 6 foot, so i am safe from slips
but not the deflection of
the deflated green beans
that Matthew flung at Jon
    (i must admit they were very flingable)

jeffrey almost got the first ever pink slip
for wanting extra cookies

i was secretly handed a counterfeit ladybug
by laquisha before she left the playground

i carried the illegal goods and a smile on my face
back home with a friend and no pink slip.

i followed the tracks i made.
i remember being told how capitalization
enhances sentence order and declares importance

and how i got a C in penmanship in fourth grade
because Mrs. Prugh didn't like my capitalized cursive letters
mine looked like ornate Greek Gods

but they aren't supposed to be Greek or Gods, i was told
and i looked at my giant red square-shaped pencil with dismay -
i was going to be an architect anyway, like my dad
Alexander the Great was the prince of Macedonia

• His father told him Macedonia was too small for him

• He spread Greek culture from Egypt to India by killing people, like Persians

• Which is what made him great and worth studying

• He might have been gay
When i was a kid
i always wanted to run.

i was told never to run in the hallway -
only in gym class.

now i don’t run at all,
except to catch a bus or a TV show

Gym Class failed me.
dear blue fishie in the classroom fishtank

i want to pet you,
you look soft.

i want to feel your blue skin.
i wish i had fishie blue skin.
can i borrow yours sometime?

remember when i snuck you salami on wednesday?
it sat there on the rocks
ms. jones saw it all big there
and she got me in trouble.
i thought you'd like salami.
it's my favorite.

grandpa says
everyone loves salami, even non-meat-eating people,
they are just fooling themselves.

now i don't get to sit next to you anymore. i miss you.

it's probably nice to have lots of fishie friends
in the tank, you swim around all day and through the castle
and bother the big fish on the bottom with whiskers.

i wish i could be a fish. then i'd have friends.

your pal,
marty
(row 2 / desk 3)
But I can't help think that chairs
could have been made better than this.

I am boxed into this medieval torture contraption
if I scoot up, my desk scoots
if I scoot back, my desk scoots
if I scoot side ways, my desk tilts over
if I lean forward, I get a blunt edge to the abdomen
if I lean backward, if possible, the whole world ends
with the desktop crashing on my head

I feel like a horse chasing an apple that is space
my arms have no choice but to lay
like beached whales on my desktop
the grooves in the seat are mocking
they were placed to give the impression
that comfort was a consideration;
maybe for mannequins, but
my butt is not plastic
and this reliably turns
my fleshy butt the color eggshell

I can feel 3 knuckles of my spine
sharpening on the steel reinforced backrest
the designers were afraid my torso
was at least twice the size my lower body
and might emancipate itself
from the chair completely -
my gaze shifting rapidly from teacher
to gridded ceiling tiles and hanging snowflakes -
but, that is not the case, I choose
not to negotiate with the backboard,
lean forward on my arms, ready for combat

and so for the entirety of World History today I write this note:
  I can make a better chair one day.
i can trace my history in school
through periods of gym shoes
they usually lasted about a year.
at the beginning, they were too clean
by the end, they were barely shoes
and in between, in good form, i didn’t notice them.
Pssst...
I like your haircut.
courageous carlos and jive jill
run into a red brick wall
and find each other
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Chips</th>
<th>Drink</th>
<th>Sandwich</th>
<th>Receptacle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>w. 3</td>
<td>Nacho Cheese Doritos</td>
<td>Capri Sun Safari</td>
<td>Classic PB and J</td>
<td>Hulk Super Cooler Lunch Sack!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w. 4</td>
<td>Nacho Cheese Doritos</td>
<td>Capri Sun Safari</td>
<td>Classic PB and J</td>
<td>Hulk Super Cooler Lunch Sack!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w. 5</td>
<td>Nacho Cheese Doritos</td>
<td>Capri Sun Safari</td>
<td>Classic PB and J</td>
<td>Hulk Super Cooler Lunch Sack!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w. 6</td>
<td>Nacho Cheese Doritos</td>
<td>Capri Sun Safari</td>
<td>Classic PB and J</td>
<td>Hulk Super Cooler Lunch Sack!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w. 7</td>
<td>Nacho Cheese Doritos</td>
<td>Capri Sun Safari</td>
<td>Classic PB and J</td>
<td>Hulk Super Cooler Lunch Sack!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w. 10</td>
<td>2 month old Slim-Fast Diet Bar</td>
<td>Water from drinking fountain</td>
<td>Classic PB and J</td>
<td>Hulk Super Cooler Lunch Sack!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w. 11</td>
<td>50 cents for purchase</td>
<td>Same, Grocery trip pending</td>
<td>Classic PB and J</td>
<td>Hulk Super Cooler Lunch Sack!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w. 12</td>
<td>Lay's Potato Chips</td>
<td>Capri Sun Pacific Cooler</td>
<td>Classic PB and J</td>
<td>Hulk Super Cooler Lunch Sack!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w. 13</td>
<td>Lay's Potato Chips</td>
<td>Capri Sun Pacific Cooler</td>
<td>Classic PB and J</td>
<td>Hulk Super Cooler Lunch Sack!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w. 14</td>
<td>Lay's Potato Chips</td>
<td>Capri Sun Pacific Cooler</td>
<td>Classic PB and J</td>
<td>Hulk Super Cooler Lunch Sack!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w. 17</td>
<td>Lay's Potato Chips</td>
<td>Capri Sun Pacific Cooler</td>
<td>Classic PB and J</td>
<td>Hulk Super Cooler Lunch Sack!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w. 18</td>
<td>Lay's Potato Chips</td>
<td>Capri Sun Pacific Cooler</td>
<td>Classic PB and J</td>
<td>Hulk Super Cooler Lunch Sack!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w. 19</td>
<td>Cheeto's</td>
<td>Capri Sun Wild Cherry</td>
<td>Classic PB and J</td>
<td>Brown bag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w. 20</td>
<td>Cheeto's</td>
<td>Capri Sun Wild Cherry</td>
<td>Classic PB and J</td>
<td>Brown bag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w. 21</td>
<td>Cheeto's</td>
<td>Capri Sun Wild Cherry</td>
<td>Classic PB and J</td>
<td>Hand-me down Garfield Lunch Box</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w. 24</td>
<td>Cheeto's</td>
<td>Capri Sun Wild Cherry</td>
<td>Classic PB and J</td>
<td>Hand-me down Garfield Lunch Box</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w. 25</td>
<td>Cheeto's</td>
<td>Capri Sun Wild Cherry</td>
<td>Classic PB and J</td>
<td>Hand-me down Garfield Lunch Box</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w. 26</td>
<td>Cool Ranch Doritos</td>
<td>Capri Sun Strawberry</td>
<td>Classic PB and J</td>
<td>Hand-me down Garfield Lunch Box</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w. 27</td>
<td>Cool Ranch Doritos</td>
<td>Capri Sun Strawberry</td>
<td>Classic PB and J</td>
<td>Hand-me down Garfield Lunch Box</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w. 28</td>
<td>Cool Ranch Doritos</td>
<td>Capri Sun Strawberry</td>
<td>Classic PB and J</td>
<td>Hand-me down Garfield Lunch Box</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the lunchroom

grunpy lunch ladies (and one lunchman) patrol the mass feeding lines
hairnets strangle freedom-loving hair
unsuccessfully, bleckl, large pale eyes scan
hands grope crosswords on milk cartons
delicate bottoms smoosh together on
cosmic colored benches with cracks
saved for the girls,
secretly playing footsie is mandatory
hands stealthily trade goods – chicken nugget for pudding –
a private winking ballet conducted
above the lengthy tables shines a yellow-toothed grid of fluorescents
gnawing on a collection of crowded Styrofoam trays
splattered platters of catering
(picasso, eat your artichoke-heart out)
peashotdogschickennugsgetsnachoscarrrotspotatoesmilk

everything goes to the same place
what do you have for lunch?
the incredible hulk ninja amphibious fruit snacks!
good for the nose.
school hotdogs are limp
hostages in soggy buns
repaired with ketchup
“kunal is throwing food!”
at least he has ambition.
honors biology 100

for today's class, a scientific lecture on poetry:

WE OBSERVE THAT:

a poem starts on paper with ink, but lives in the mind and blood. words float along a lazy river with platelets and white blood cells in the poet's circulatory system. ideas form electrical synapses in the brain and the brain selectively siphons words from the blood stream. the hands transfer the words to paper. the eyes collect the words from the page into the brain cavity, and subsequently, ideas reenter the blood stream.

EXPERIMENTAL DATA:

- a poem was written on an 8.5 x 11 sheet of notebook paper by a student poet
- the paper was then compressed into a golf ball sized piece of paper
- traits of the poem: weight at 2.3 grams, approximately.5 inch diameter, markedly adolescent in content
- the poem was clamped 4 inches above a bunsen burner and tested for heat resistance
- after 1 minute, the poem was indistinguishable in form: a .2 gram pile of ash
- upon final analysis the poet insisted that the poem still existed

THEREFORE:

a poem should be written
in black and bleed red,
but the poem will always exist in white
Mr. Hungi's voice is like listening to a lawn mower. White chalk outlines his crotch from where he itches after solving problems. Class notes are usually about lots of dead people and the people that killed them. (Which are now very dead as well) and an old man AND the sea, and an old man AND the sea, and an old man AND the sea, and of course, the likelihood that I will inherit a barrage of diseases from a vast cess pool I have charted called my family — I am at least getting cancer or having a kidney fail. And finally, my last class, we only watch movies and usually sleep while dinosaurs eat other dinosaurs and die and evolve into humans that have to go to school.
The Line Cutter

i want

to be

next to

a good poem.
If I had the time
    I would listen to all your concerns
    I would take you all to the bathroom

If I could get beyond the fence
    I would lift you up on my shoulders
    I would make today a permanent field-trip

If I could see what your mind sees
    I would pull the fence down
    I would raise a mile high jungle gym

If I had the shoulders to shoulder all of you
    I would reluctantly tell you to grow your own
    I would stand behind you

If only I had the words that might never be erased from the board.
sharing handshakes with ink
on the page and then wearing
the words like temporary tattoos
on your lips for a couple of minutes
humming along with the buzz of
a light bulb and not feeling so alone
a monologue from the playground

Ya know, ya think ya'd get some respect
With legs firmly planted in the groun'.
Sleek, rippling muscles, buns o' plastic
My abs so defined, they barbed wire
I's got steel braided hair with rubber bands at the ends
I'm a force'a nature.
Livin' outside, rain or shine

I gots hundreds of problems – 'side from the weather
Lollygaggin', lunch pail swingin' kids
Touchin' on me daily
Woosey little smiling sacks of flesh
Garbed up in 'dem power ranger froo froo's
And silly pink pony shoes that kick furiously

I put smiles on their faces and obstacles in front of'em
Ta learn. An' what?
They scratch me with rocks or break ma' parts
Kids run aroun' me, over me, tru me
They slide on my tongue, pull on my 'air,
'Ang from my spine, kick my achin' liver

Which hurts me, especially the kickin' ma' luvely liver,
But I ain't cross, though I should be,
'Cause every day, without no exceptions,
I get to see some of them happy smiles trip to the groun'.
Shoes, froo froo's, fleshy sacks an' all. And
At that point, I knows they learnin' ta fit
Into their bodies. And next day, rain or shine
I'll be out there to challenge them again.
no, no, no, NO; school
i am the child.

i ate the glue
the play-doh
the pencils
the markers

i am the child.

i took the blocks
the train tracks
i made an elevated track
around the room

i am the child.

i was noticed by the teacher
i felt good
i made a ramp
i launched the train

i am the poet.

i get in trouble for it.
chasing malika was hard
without the metal pole in the way
ice packs are a badge of honor
cramped cavern of pills and vomit
herein dwells the curly-haired middle-aged
plastic-handed band-aid-bearing-beast
with the 70's hypnotizing orange-flowered hippie wallpaper
and the blue bed of death
i'd rather bleed
Rachel - runner-up - girls can play and do anything that guys can do! and they usually do it better. boys don't have the stamina and they are ugly and smelly and really mean usually and don't know that we can do

Preye - the third - when i grow up i'm going to be a professional softball player when my skinned knee gets better! the sun feels really good on my skin. i like being outside where my hair flies in the wind and my mind can roam free of the

Shannon - the pits - i am so glad that they are letting me play today. yesterday, i sat and chased bugs with smelly flies in the wind and my mom says that it comes from cows. this ball is bigger than my

Carl - dreamer

when they put me in a box, i hoped it would be a big box with a door
“i want to play.”
i want to sleep.
please

don't

make

me

stand

in

line

it

will

make

me

boring
Look!

inside
every bobbing head
is a brain

i think,
therefore
i am
and you are
a perception
at least

to you,
you
are you

"my brain"
you can't see it
feel it, hear it,
smell it, taste it (which is good)
nor can i

and we can't see the other people's brains either
and when they read this
we don't know what they will think
surely, they will think different things
some may like this.
others may find it trite.

but maybe they are just i -
perceptions of our own minds-
like you.
and the only real i is you
billions of different you's
bobbing to different beats

and when you think
about all of you, your brain stretches
with intellectual excitement.
that is why you have a headache today.
this is the space
in which I learn.
(the day the copy machine broke)
From a scattered, squeaky, red-headed voice

I can't leap at all and today I was asked to leap and I did it 5 times in a row!!!!

spread to the four cardinal directions

by 5 year old leaping legs

with one grand yapper on top
my first pta meeting

a lot of angry people, mostly women, trudged into the room
wearing colorful sweaters, broaches of children's faces,
and frustrated grunts

after a chorus of chatter
the most colorful pinned and chatty person in the room
stood up and proudly stated (not quite in this arrangement):

"school

most often the target
of a host of complaints
and legislation and recent
cut-backs

is not often noticed
for the word "cool"
which is contained somewhere
within its word"

and some people fake-laughed and some clapped
and a small section of people in the corner rolled their eyes
and to my surprise, she continued, undoubtedly motivated by the response with:

"see, let me draw it out"

and she picked up a large piece of butcher paper and wrote

S C H O O L

she adjusted her pants, smiled sideways
like she had forgotten why
she was here, and said in a very stern voice,
"We, the parents and teachers, are responsible for these letters."
shoebox full of rocks

a curious boy tilts it

he holds the ocean
without my desk and executive
chair and fancy tie, children
might be more inclined to speak
to me, sitting on the floor

g out with the telephone i say
two tin cans on a string
to talk to the secretary and
a trained monkey, boris, for mail

a monkey for mail is brilliant
but will people respect me?
 i'll know more students
but i'll also probably have no job

alright, i'll keep all this oak
furniture and the fancy red
g power tie and the monkey
and hidden from everyone

i'll keep a string in my pocket
to remind me why i'm here
removing every tiny remnant of children

omar, perfectionist, shut the door

a pencil dropped from the ceiling
in every school there are...

toilets
schedules
stutters
scrapes
fights

in most schools there are also...

janitors
counselors
speech pathologists
nurses
deans

which are sometimes overlooked
and underappreciated
field trip to the zoo
animal kingdom / human children
if only there wasn't glass
a poem on the board for the near-sighted child in the back of the room
hi.
i miss you every day
i always wore sunglasses
ripped Levi's

a heavy pair of big yellow
boots and a suitcase

i could trudge through
walls and eat lunch on the moon

without never having to take tests

As a child I was an imaginary playmate.
Most children's poems rhyme and fail at providing substance

Sometimes they (sad adults) can't even find words
That rhyme, (English being the largest language in the world)
And make up words, like "stroople," to simulate the speech of a child.

Stroople is a fine word from the mouth of a child
but often used incorrectly in the business world of the children's author.

Double o's in made up words are very popular.
Seussical adult children's poets think they are appealing
To the young eye –
I admit they look like two small eyeballs, see?   o  o

They (failed artists) claim, "New words foster children's imagination and creativity!"
I'd say, "No."
It looks like you couldn't find
Two words that could rhyme. (not to mention provide substance)

Creativity and Imagination are much different
They aren't a collaboration of a Caldecot, coffee-breathed illustrator
and a lackluster, over-hyped, depressed author –
Both hoodabalam zim-zam DOOMED adults
That turn childhood into a really bad drug trip.

A child may see a tree and think "jarboo."
Which is perfectly valid, and titillating as a word.
but attempts by adults to simulate such freshness
always fail. adults are indoctrinated with words.
i want you to feel powerful
like you can take
all of your responsibilities and
tell them that
the pants they chose
to wear today
(the tight ones without any give)
are completely
unacceptable.
ode to my teacher

oh, my teacher
i know when you put
those “Seek and YOU will Find!”
and “Go For It!” and “Kids Dig Learning!”
Posters on the wall, you thought
“The kids will like this,” maybe even
“It will change their lives”

and oh, my teacher
when you put the hamster, Binky
in the cage near Evan
i know you thought
that we might take care of it
that Evan might even learn to care
we can bond around furry little animals
stuck in a 3x5 cage, right?

oh, my teacher
remember when you taught us that King Tut
was embalmed and put in a tomb
with food and jewels so that he could live
a very rich afterlife? and how you thought
maybe we should try embalming something and burying it?

oh, well, my teacher
we went for it. Dug real deep.
evan did at least.
and Binky is under the wheel.
under 6 inches of wood chips
with some Doritos and a dime.
the principal

heavy oak desk
grizzly bear
smells of cigars
scary as hell
kills ducks
for pleasure
huge mustache
curly ends
civil war buff
swords on wall
military swagger
keeps comb and
secretary in back pocket
rubber ducks make bath time fun

quack

quack

<fart bubble>
hey wheezer beezer!
this year
was magnificent
remember
when you were
my lab partner
and you totally
mixed the wrong chemicals
and an acidic
metallic confetti rained
on our class
and pock marked my skin
dyed my hair
and my grade
also died
a week later
you used
my violin
as a door prop
the night
of our concert
i stood for my solo`
with a pile of wood

keep in touch.
a soft rainbow shrugs over the playground where phil eats an apple, shonda chases jill, jeff runs up the slide, jess goes on the monkey bars in the wrong direction, and the kickball skirts over the fence into the street.