

**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

*a powerpoint poem on Alexander III Philippon Makedonon 356-323 B.C*

- Alexander the Great was the prince of Macedonia

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- 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.



*I like your haircut.*



courageous carlos and jive jill  
run into a red brick wall  
and find each other

# Lunch Schedule for Leonard Fillmore (6.5 years old) - 10/3 to 10/28

Date	Chips	Drink	Sandwich	Receptacle
Nov. 3	Nacho Cheesier Doritos	Capri Sun Safari	Classic PB and J	Hulk Super Cooler Lunch Sack!
Nov. 4	Nacho Cheesier Doritos	Capri Sun Safari	Classic PB and J	Hulk Super Cooler Lunch Sack!
Nov. 5	Nacho Cheesier Doritos	Capri Sun Safari	Classic PB and J	Hulk Super Cooler Lunch Sack!
Nov. 6	Nacho Cheesier Doritos	Capri Sun Safari	Classic PB and J	Hulk Super Cooler Lunch Sack!
Nov. 7	Nacho Cheesier Doritos	Capri Sun Safari	Classic PB and J	Hulk Super Cooler Lunch Sack!
Nov. 10	2 month old Slim-Fast Diet Bar	Water from drinking fountain	Classic PB and J	Hulk Super Cooler Lunch Sack!
Nov. 11	50 cents for purchase	Same, Grocery trip pending	Classic PB and J	Hulk Super Cooler Lunch Sack!
Nov. 12	Lay's Potato Chips	Capri Sun Pacific Cooler	Classic PB and J	Hulk Super Cooler Lunch Sack!
Nov. 13	Lay's Potato Chips	Capri Sun Pacific Cooler	Classic PB and J	Hulk Super Cooler Lunch Sack!
Nov. 14	Lay's Potato Chips	Capri Sun Pacific Cooler	Classic PB and J	Hulk Super Cooler Lunch Sack!
Nov. 17	Lay's Potato Chips	Capri Sun Pacific Cooler	Classic PB and J	Hulk Super Cooler Lunch Sack!
Nov. 18	Lay's Potato Chips	Capri Sun Pacific Cooler	Classic PB and J	Hulk Lunch Sack LOST ON PLAYGROUND
Nov. 19	Cheeto's	Capri Sun Wild Cherry	Classic PB and J	Brown bag
Nov. 20	Cheeto's	Capri Sun Wild Cherry	Classic PB and J	Brown bag
Nov. 21	Cheeto's	Capri Sun Wild Cherry	Classic PB and J	Hand-me down Garfield Lunch Box
Nov. 24	Cheeto's	Capri Sun Wild Cherry	Classic PB and J	Hand-me down Garfield Lunch Box
Nov. 25	Cheeto's	Capri Sun Wild Cherry	Classic PB and J	Hand-me down Garfield Lunch Box
Nov. 26	Cool Ranch Doritos	Capri Sun Strawberry	Classic PB and J	Hand-me down Garfield Lunch Box
Nov. 27	Cool Ranch Doritos	Capri Sun Strawberry	Classic PB and J	Hand-me down Garfield Lunch Box
Nov. 28	Cool Ranch Doritos	Capri Sun Strawberry	Classic PB and J	Hand-me down Garfield Lunch Box

## the lunchroom

grumpy lunch ladies (and one lunchman) patrol the mass feeding lines  
hairnets strangle freedom-loving hair  
unsuccessfully, bleck!, 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)  
peashotdogschickennuggetsnachoscarrotspotatoesmilk

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

blah blah blah  
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' lovely 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.

snow snow snow snow snow

snow snow snow snow snow snow snow

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



Jose - current 4 square champion - yes! i am the god of four square AND i got chicken nuggets for lunch! the ball smacks the ground with a metallic twang and the harder i toss it to the ground the faster	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 Carl because we were the only ones left out here. i like cheese a lot and 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 in gym 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

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  
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.

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*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 ducky's make bathtime fun*

quack

quack

<fart bubble>

\

*yearbook*

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.