The Poetry of Transformation

Poems from Rise Inspire Academy in San Antonio, Texas
THE

Poetry

of

Transformation
THE POETRY OF TRANSFORMATION

This workshop was generously funded by Poetry Foundation and Rise Inspire Academy.

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Images from Canva

Student work has been edited as lightly as possible to in order to honor their original voices

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FOREWORD: THE POETRY OF TRANSFORMATION

Dear Reader,

We want you to know that most of the students featured in this anthology do not identify as authors.

This anthology is the culmination of a seven-week art and poetry workshop at Rise Inspire Academy, a drug and alcohol recovery high school in San Antonio, Texas. Because Rise Inspire Academy isn't a traditional high school, teaching a workshop in this setting presented many unique challenges for us as teaching artists. Instead of working with the same students week after week, we often saw new faces at each workshop. Some students joined us for one workshop or half a workshop. Others joined us for several weeks.

We quickly learned that we couldn't design lessons that relied on the previous week's lesson to make sense. Instead, prompts and lessons had to meet students where they were. In that week, at that moment. Most of the time, that meant never presenting students with a blank page. Instead, we gave them something to transform and make their own. They wrote lines inspired by the rhythm of their favorite songs and "mad-libbed" about emotions. They searched journals and magazines for the perfect lines for their blackout poems. During a guest artist visit from Joyous Windrider Jiménez, students transformed their writing into recorded narration that was put to visuals by the visiting artist. The video can be viewed through the QR code at the end of this anthology. As part of our opening and closing ritual for each workshop, we invited participants to write compliments and encouraging messages to their classmates. These anonymous affirmations now adorn the pages of this poetry collection.

The poetry in this anthology is sometimes devastating and bleak. But also uplifting and hopeful. It's silly, sad, and a little nonsensical. Ultimately, it's an honest representation of the human experience.
From the outside, it may be tempting to reduce these students to the painful combination of events that brought them to a recovery setting. However, we hope this anthology transforms how you view these students. We hope you see them as more than students who attended a few writing workshops at a recovery high school. We hope you see them as authors and artists with something to say. But more importantly, we hope this anthology transforms how they see themselves. This anthology is for them.

All the transformations described above wouldn't be possible without the support of Bridget Maggard and the staff at Rise Inspire Academy, Gemini Ink's Partner Classes Program, the entire Gemini Ink staff, and the Poetry Foundation. Special thanks to guest artist Joyous Windrider Jiménez for sharing her art with our students and bringing their writing to life with her poetry video and to Jessica Betancourt for designing the anthology you hold in your hands.

Aminah Decé and Christen Barron
Gemini Ink Teaching Artists
2024
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You matter so much to me in my life. I seriously don’t think I could ask for a better friend. I really don’t know if I could’ve survived this without your support and kindness.
El corazón

El corazón is a tool we use to live, to breathe, to feel as long as we have these bodies. Each beat is a reminder of kindness every day, even in small ways. Take this moment to hold your heart and to marvel at its music and how steady it keeps your soul alive.

I often see the heart as theetter. It's a symbol of saying, but how deep are we willing to go? This concept can be a fierce, so possible we are dealing with buried heartache. Is it your own or someone else's. When we are asked, we can consider to accept it with all its wounds and bruises you become more aware of the hearts of others. And in this way we help one another heal.

A reverence reading of this poem may mean you are finally on the mend (from a broken heart) Or there has been physical healing from a heart condition. You could also think of a heart swelling for someone new or familiar. Could this be the after of an injury or has found its target? Whether or not romance is involved remember how good it feels to love and to say, I love you to someone you hold close in your corazón. This is true heart medicine for all.

"Look at the stars. Look how they shine for you. And all the things you do."

Coldplay

El Corazón by Ruth W.
RUTH W.

EL CORAZÓN

Hold your heart and marvel at its music
How deep are we willing to go
We are dealing with buried heartache
Accept it with all its wounds and bruises
Become more aware of the hearts of others
Help one another heal
You are finally on the mend from a broken heart
El Corazón swelling for someone new
Remember how good it feels to love
I love you
This is true heart medicine for all
RUTH W.

WHISPERS OF LOVE

Hope for joy not lost
Blessings of love promise me peace
Flying with dream-esque...
RUTH W.

BITTERSWEET CONTENTMENT

The bittersweet contentment that comes in the sounds of the rainforest.
Sandy skies are covered green.
Smell the fresh rain and let your thoughts wash away like dew running off forest leaves.
K.F.

SIDEWALK STATEMENT

There are more ideas and thoughts
That I can’t even bear
To explain or try
to fulfill
K.F.

GUILT

guilt is red, brown, black, dark gray,
it is an effortless feeling that takes over you
isolated sounds like how the cold fronts make the house
    creak
it tastes like acid in your throat and tears dripping down your
    neck
guilt lives in the creaking of that house
and it lays in your bed all day and
all night getting closer
to falling through into all the
trash and mess
it made for itself
K.F.

TRANSFORMATION

I picture a butterfly. I wonder how that butterfly started its journey—how it got to the place it was. That type of transformation is absolutely intriguing from a small, microscopic egg. As it grows, it doesn't immediately transform. It takes steps and evolution to get where its parents were, then it repeats the process.

"YOU ARE A WONDERFUL EXPERIENCE."
Z.C.

PNEUMONIA

Death lurks
Brown and black emotions
A lung collapses on its body
Unsteady days and nights sound like
a clock
ticking closer to midnight

It tastes like blood, tears, and burnt flesh
The feeling knowing
That you don’t know where you’re going
at the end of the night
In the pitch black
you have a sneaky feeling,
you’re never coming back
Z.C.

HAiku

Mature fantasy.
Dreaming peace, at last, my turn.
Thunder slowly creeps.
Z.C.

ON "BEAUTIFUL" BY EMINEM

In life, complications happen and everyone’s hand of cards is specific to them. Some people are in worse positions than others. At the end of the day, it’s up to each individual to do what they need to do to “flip their cards” and help themselves walk out of their hole.
Z.C.

FIVE-FINGER DISCOUNT

As I was in Target looking for some nice pens and notebooks, I had a feeling I wouldn't be able to afford my needs. When I got to the aisle I needed, I found a couple of packs of pens—the nicest ones I could find. I got colored markers, ballpoint pens, mechanical pencils, and highlighters. Reasonably, I could have paid for the highlighters alone. So I stuffed the slim packages into my waistband and walked to the notebook section. I found one—a hardcover with a wonderful design that I couldn't pass up. It was the last thing I needed, and I thought it would fit perfectly in the backside of my waistband. I slipped it in and got on the move out of the store. As I walked out, I told the worker to have a blessed day, and I went home with my brand-new merchandise.
Z.C.

COMPLIMENT TO MY INNER CHILD

You always knew what you wanted. You didn’t know how to feel how you wanted, so you explored. You went on adventures and missions, and took many chances and risks. At the end of the day, you couldn’t do it alone, but you knew when to ask for help.
ANONYMOUS

GETTING SOBER

By getting sober I believe
A functional mind or life I could achieve
By seeing my part and learning to process
I grew as a person and made some progress
I am not quite fixed, I am not perfect
But now I know, I know I’m worth it.
ANONYMOUS

CLAY

As a child I was clay
I was told, listen to what your parents say
I didn’t know that words, that someone’s words could leave
    such an impression
How could these beliefs, these words strung in succession
Leave me lost with a new belief that I didn’t know
Would affect my life and mind as I grow.
My eyes, they no longer see
See the imperfections as an “ok,” a normal part of me
Shaped and molded without consent, without permission
These words obscured and blurred my vision
From that day forward I was no longer me, who I thought I
    should be
My father had removed, he had stolen a part of me
I believed my clay had hardened forever
These words were embedded, no ability to be severed
But my clay, it was not dry
Contorting its shape would not be easy however, I know I
    needed to try
Maybe not alone, but with the help of others
Those words that steered my life, could be removed or at least
covered.
ANONYMOUS

BITTERSWEETNESS

Bittersweetness is honey amber with black specks.
It is an oven that heats, but can’t burn.
Bittersweetness sounds like a loving coo from a comforting
   gran (long gone).
It tastes like melted butterscotch or sometimes warm
   cranberries and apples.
It soothes my fevered memories.
Bittersweetness lives dormant; buried and quiet until the bloom
   of emotion ...
By taste or touch or smell ... a sound!
And lovingly, with warmth, it fades into a small spot of
   memory.
**ANONYMOUS**

**MUNDANE POEM**

That insistent, blaring alarm always interrupts my dreamscape. Before I can even open my eyes I can feel the heated sunlight penetrate through my thin, pale curtains. With a heavy hand I grasp my phone and open one eye to tap off that pushy alarm.

My muscles squeak and my bones pop, crackle, snap as I stretch to rise. My chosen dressings are assembled along my chair, as if a person had vanished with just their flesh and body leaving behind an ensemble of empty material.

Getting ready for school, I trudge along towards my bathroom ... with water and soap, I come to life.
ANONYMOUS

STATEMENT POEM

I go by anonymous
I’m from a place that isn’t on the map
It smells like burnt cotton and feels like hard sediments
I explore the underground
I have visions of being something I’m not
When you look me in the eyes I hope you see
the strange circulation of my thoughts
I’m proud of nothing
It makes me feel like I’m not real and it hurts
In the future, I will be in a new plane and do things
untihinkable of
Love is just the fear of loss.
C.F.
TRANSFORMATION

Transformation,

Demonstration

The way of motion
Moving like the ocean
Every move is a mission
Hush ...

You’re blossoming into a new beginning
C.F.
COMPLIMENT TO INNER CHILD

I am trying to love myself more each day.

I AM WORTHY.
L.M.

FALSE FRIEND (BLACK OUT LONG VERSION)

2 down
More to go
Feeling a false connection in this false friend
In this limited ocean, I can’t control it
I’m losing my hold on what I love so boldly
I feel my legs dissolve into this sea of fake water
Fake love
Fake living
An apathetic visitor leaves me so I might go to heaven.
Dismember these unholy candy soldiers
Put their limbs up my nose so I can have a repose from this life that ebbs and flows
L.M.

FALSE FRIEND (BLACK OUT VERSION)

False friend
Loves so boldly
Fake love
Apathetic visitor, leave me 7
Go to heaven
Limbs up my nose
Ebb and flow
D.G.

DEEP LOATHE

Self-loathing is yellow
It is a deep void that draws you in where you can’t escape
Self-loathing sounds like something quiet but it's so loud you
can’t ever hear all the good blocking sucking eating away at
you until nothing is left
it tastes like grit and feels like ten tons breaking you away
Self-loathing lives in you and everywhere you go
even the happy places
And eats away at you until you are gone and can’t hear
or see anything you once loved
D.G.

COMPLIMENT TO MY INNER CHILD

I wish I could love like you.
D.G.

THAT WHICH CAN’T BE FOUND

Following the wind as it calls
Looking for something you won’t find
Obeying who calls looking for answers
D.G.

BADASS MANTRA

I am a godlike human
You do not stand a chance against me
I’m the king’s son you couldn’t kill
You will not beat me
You will not end me
I will always come back to look you straight in the eye
Know that I am a beacon of power and glory
You do not stand a chance against me
BRYANT M.
BADASS MANTRA

I am a smart person
You do not stand a chance against me
A descendant of powerful beings
Who you couldn’t stomp on
You will not break me
You will not stop me
I always brighten when you look straight into my eyes
Know that I am a beacon of golden light
BRYANT M.

LIFE’S PROBLEMS

Sad is dark blue
It is an ocean that you swim in and relax
Sad sounds like crying and agony
It tastes like still water
And has a salty taste
Sad lives in the Atlantic Ocean
And it makes you feel like pain sometimes
BRYANT M.

THE TIME I FELT TRANSFORMED

The time I felt transformed was when I was sober for a year. I felt happy for the first time and I felt safe. I actually cared about myself for the first time.
JONAH A.

DAY 7

The place I come home to
is a wonderful place and I
would do anything to keep it safe.
JONAH A.

CHAPTER 7

Do you recognize?
Are you able to see where
your body, heart, mind, and spirit are today?
JONAH A.

STATEMENT POEM

I go by Jonah
I’m from Philly
It smells like cheesesteaks and sunshine
I explore nature
I have visions of money
When you look me in the eyes I hope you see good
I’m proud of my life
It makes me feel like a god and a sigma
In the future I’ll be in the U.S. and sell real estate.
JONAH A.

LOVE

A shady spiral
In love, turn on putrid stage
He also wastes time
JONAH A.

BADASS MANTRA

I am a complicated man
You do not stand a chance against me
A descendant of powerful people
who you couldn’t beat
You will not see me fear
You will not test me
I will always stand to look you straight in the eye
Know that I am a beacon of greatness
You do not stand a chance against me
J.K.
GOOBER

Gooberish is neon purple.
It is a doohickey that quarbles
gooberish sounds like blurgensneist.
It tastes like shorst and blimwick
gooberish lives inside of my cardiac tissue lodged within
the walls of my left ventricle
and glorbocks there.

YOU’RE AN AMAZING FRIEND AND
YOU ALWAYS MAKE ME LAUGH!
I LOVE HOW YOU KNOW EXACTLY
HOW TO MAKE ME LAUGH.

45
J.K.

SONG LYRIC REMIX

The light is running low,
and I dread that fact I know
all my reasons to be shriveled
up into dust, save for one.
J.K.

THE ORATOR

Cold, glass eyes gaze unblinking at the monotone orator as the orator gives their laser sharp focus to the words. The monologue flows, steady, uninterrupted, homogenous in character, or lack thereof. There is one voice to the exclusion of all others, and you would be hard-pressed to notice a difference in the room—in the absence of the students.
J.K.

TRANSFORMATION

There is not one specific moment in which I have felt myself transformed with a distinctly different sense of self before or after. I have, however, felt a sense of a gradual, creeping deterioration of my character. Every iteration of myself from every day in my life, I could identify with myself from the week prior. Yet, myself as a child would look upon my present actions with profound horror. These days, I wonder if it’s possible for me to go back. They say you have to want to get better, but I don’t want to … not really.
J.K.

TRANSFORMATION (BLACKOUT VERSION)

There is not one distinct me.
I see myself as a child,
As a profound horror.
I’ve been this way.
Always.
Transformation (Blackout Version), by J. K.
K.P.

COMPLIMENT TO INNER CHILD

You survived rehab.

YOU ARE AWESOME BECAUSE OF YOUR POSITIVITY AND WILLINGNESS TO PROGRESS! IT'S CONTAGIOUS!
Smoke pours from my nose and mouth
So much tragedy in the south
Generational hurt passed down to me
Praying to god to set me free

When I’m alone I cry for help
When around family I protect myself
With lies and a facade
Some must think this sounds odd
to remove from society

My mother prays for sobriety
And yet I say leave me be
This tree is my only companion
My only friend
Has been with me almost to the very end
And yet I abstain now

A wrinkle in my father’s brow
Has been lifted finally
Can’t you all at last see
These leaves weren’t the solution
Simply an ends to a means
No longer hanging with the fiends

At last I have transformed
My heart no longer scorned
K.P.

STRANGER

Coercion is deep blue
It is a shapeless predator that moves slowly
coercion sounds like creaking doors and hushed voices
it tastes like fear and a choked up throat
Coercion lives in the dark alleys and tight corners
And lurks
K.P.

EDGELESS

Walking around in my coffin clothes
Praying hunnids hear my woes
Living by the Block, 19th
My mama wondering when I'll be clean
LUNA Y.

MY DANCE PARTNER

My dancing partner and I
Walking in this precise wind

As we look for cover she reminds me of a villain
But I still obey her

I’m eating my sour noodles
I realize I’m a sucker for her
LUNA Y.

STATEMENT POEM

I go by Luna
I’m from Miami
It smells like mangroves and Cuban coffee
I explore San Antonio
I have visions of having a great career
When you look me in the eyes I hope you see kindness
I’m proud of how far I’ve come
It makes me feel happy and sad
In the future I will be back home and I’ll be a nurse
LUNA Y.

COMPLIMENT TO INNER CHILD

You’re beautiful, unique, and funny! You’re strong! You’re not weird, you’re just smarter than the people around you. Your crazy hair is gorgeous, not ugly!
LUNA Y.

HAPPY

Happiness is pink
It is a lantern that glows
Pink sounds like my mom’s voice in my head
telling me everything’s going to be okay
It tastes like chocolate cake and strawberries
Joy lives in the backyard at night
just sitting with my sisters
and it creates beautiful memories

LUNA,
YOU HAVE DISPLAYED A GREAT ATTITUDE
TOWARDS YOUR PARTICIPATION IN GROUPS
SINCE I HAVE BEEN HERE. ONCE YOU MASTER
SIT-UPS YOU WILL CRUSH RIM!
B.
SUNSET

Ecstasy is warm orange
It is a sunset that lasts forever
Ecstasy sounds like soft friendly whispers
It tastes like volcanic well water and smoking firecrackers
Ecstasy lives in an isolated wooden cabin by the river and watches the sun set

YOU'RE SO PRETTY, YOUR BEAUTY MAKES ME GIGGLE AND KICK MY FEET.
J.M.
MY FUTURE

I want to transform my lifestyle in da future. I’m tired of living da life I am and make my shit better breakin da cycle. Making my whole family better by becoming a leader. I wanna make a new cycle so my kids don’t gotta worry about my gang life nor any gun or drugs
My Future, by J. M.
J.M.

POWER

I have the power
To charm up so many women
So come home with me
J.M.

RUTHLESS

Ruthless is purple
It is a jail that is chill
Ruthless sounds like banging on doors
It tastes like dry and rotten fish
Ruthless lives in yo brain
And it makes you not care at all
KILLIAN L.

NUMB

Numb is white
It is a venom that makes you feel weird
Numb sounds like an empty cave
It tastes like hot peppers and feels like low blood circulation
Numb lives alone in the middle of the ocean
And just sits
P.S.

SUSPICIOUS

Distrust is black
It is a rope that breaks
Distrust sounds like lies coming from people you know
It tastes like homeless food and school lunch
Distrust lives anywhere
And it talks behind your back
S.G.
HMM

Through the giant trees
Wild whispers promise peace
Blows leaves next to trunk

I REALLY VALUE YOUR DEDICATION
AND LIKE THE FACT THAT YOU CAN
REACH THE TOP SHELF.
S.G.

ONE MORE TIME (BLACK OUT LONG VERSION)

One more time—one more time
I'll stop—I'll stop
Why is this so hard
I can't put it down
My parents look with disappointment
My life, my feelings so heavy
It's taking over me
But... one last time
I did it again
But now... worse than ever
I lost my job this time
The time has come
I can't do it
No more
Finally
I come to a point of staying clean
S.G.

ONE MORE TIME (BLACK OUT VERSION)

I’ll stop
Disappointment
So heavy
Worse than ever
Clean
RYAN Y.

PILL

Rope
Pill
Overdose
Take
Shoot up
Have nothing
Withdraw
Love can love
Who I am
Straight from hell
Fell outta hell
A wishing well
Pill, by Ryan Y.
J.P.

HELP, I THINK I FELL AND MY MEMORY IS BROKEN

Down desperate heart
Woman, glorious rear home
Before that greased ouch
J.P.

RANDOM WORD POEM

That vein heart, down boy
D.D.

HAPPINESS

On the journey, go
Also my fire, happy point
To ground, must return
D.D., JONAH A., AND D.

MEMORIES

Travel under me
Underground, her clamor
Specific thoughts
J.

HMM

Careless is gray
It is music that calms
Careless sounds like a soothing piano
It tastes like nothing and air
Careless lives in the middle of nowhere and likes to be alone
But hates feeling alone
LUNA Y., D.G., AND RYAN Y.

FALL

Fall was in the air
Her hair was brown like the leaves
You could taste the salty-sweet sucker on her lips
RUTH W., Z.C., S.G., AND K.F.

BURLESQUE

Moonlight whispers peace
Dreaming this lasts till we die
Silk shining just right
D.

HAPPY

Spiral on riches
Happy grace over any she
Stage over shady shes
YOU ARE SO BEAUTIFUL, CARING AND HONEST. IT'S A JOY TO SEE YOU AT SCHOOL EVERYDAY!
A.K.

BLACKOUT

Simple effort
Discomfort healing
Unnecessary suffering
Create for ourselves
Controlled by us, we add to our pain
Disparaging self-talk criticizing
Illusory pain
Our minds
Extreme physical pain
Yell, cry
Normal reaction
Painful
Accident, carelessness, blame someone
Self-manifested pain
Allow ourselves to recognize that accidents happen
When doing this work, a simple but effortless way that one can separate the discomfort necessary for healing from the unnecessary suffering we create for ourselves is to recognize what, if anything, can actually be controlled by us in any given situation. Oftentimes, we add to our pain by the way we think or see the experience, by defaulting to disparaging self-talk, or by criticizing the people or things around us. This distracts us from experiencing the actual discomfort and creates more illusory pain that doesn’t actually exist, except in our minds.

For instance, when we accidentally slam a door shut on our hand, we will of course experience extreme physical pain to some degree and possibly yell out loud or even cry in response. That, in and of itself, would be a normal reaction to a physically painful event. If we then continue to berate ourselves for the accident and speak ugly things about our carelessness or blame someone for rushing us, and so on and so on, we begin to create a story of increased mental chatter around a physical event. This is, in essence, self-manifested pain.

If we allow ourselves to be still and quiet for a moment, we may recognize that accidents happen.
ANONYMOUS

CHAPTER 4

Our body still holds trauma,
Judge whatever comes to the surface
Protect ourselves from this blatant expression of vulnerability
Ego can step aside
Healing over saving face
It feels
Easier, safer, and more comfortable to pretend
We are ready to commit to healing
See our truth
Chapter 4

our body still holds trauma, making it hard to

Our brain's role is to judge whatever comes to
the surface. We put up defenses to protect ourselves from this blan-
tant expression of vulnerability. Because of this,

It's important not to jump to conclusions.

The ego can step aside and let us see the need for healing over saving face. Protecting us fro

However, there are people who get stuck—many
don't let go of the armor or fully release the
defenses. So, it feels easier, safer, and more comfortable to pretend we

Until we are ready to commit to healing, we

...see our truth.

Chapter 4, Anonymous
ANONYMOUS

CHAKRA ONE

Recreate your reality
Safe
Secure
Grounded
Protected
Stable
I trust my body
My body trusts me
I am where I am supposed to be
This is part of the point
Meditate
Chakra One, Anonymous

I am where I am supposed to be.
I trust my body.

This is part of the process.
Meditations.

I am where I am supposed to be.
I trust my body.

Protected.
Stable.
Grounded.
Secure.
Safe.

Recreate your reality.
ANONYMOUS

SPEAKING FROM THE HEART

Speaking from the heart
After the challenges of moving
Offered an opportunity for continued growth
I am forever grateful
Speaking From the Heart

After the challenges of moving

Offered an opportunity for continued growth

I am forever grateful

Speaking from the Heart, Anonymous
VIDEO: EMOTION POEMS

Written and narrated by students at Rise Inspire Academy
Gemini Ink Visiting Artist/Visuals/Editor: Joyous Windrider Jiménez
RISE INSPIRE TEACHING ARTIST BIOS

Christen Barron is an essayist, digital content creator, and writing instructor. Originally from Savannah, Georgia, she holds an M.F.A. in Writing and a B.F.A. in Dramatic Writing from Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD). She currently teaches first-year writing and creative writing at Texas A&M University-San Antonio. Christen’s writing has appeared in YARN Literary Review, Black Fox Literary Magazine, Document, and The Journal of Writing Assessment.

Aminah Decé is a Teaching Artist from Mississippi. She was trained at the World Combat Academy, Institute of Martial Science, and maintains degrees in The Humanities, Fine Arts, and Art History/Criticism from UTSA. She began her artistic journey as a slam poet in Killeen, Texas. Through her art, Aminah discredits concepts of race and supremacy and empowers the public through art education.

GUEST ARTIST BIO

Joyous Windrider Jiménez is a writer, artist, and educator who has presented her original poetry, theatre, visual art, and videos in venues around her city since 2009. Her visual poetry has appeared in online streaming poetry events, and she was included in Puro Chicanx: Writers of the 21st Century, published by Cutthroat, A Journal Of The Arts, and The Black Earth Institute. A trauma-informed self-care coach, she designs workshops to help community members learn how to regulate their nervous system toward growth and change. Joyous was named Gemini Ink’s 2023 Teaching Artist of the Year and has been designing and delivering arts & literature workshops in San Antonio since 2012. Her students have presented their work publicly through exhibitions, performances, and publications.