

**voice** / voiss / n: how you say it. **vision** / vizh-uhn / n: how you see it. **identity** / eye-den-ti-tee /  
: who you are. **voice** / voiss / n: how you say it. **vision** / vizh-uhn / n: how you see it. **identity**

# ID

voice:vision:identity™

# define self

## 6..... **CHOP\***

“I came into this world whole / and look  
what happened to me.” —*a poem by Alfred W. Tatum*

## 10..... **Why I Write Poetry\*** —*from an essay by Kevin Powell*

### **SO I AIN'T NO GOOD GIRL**

“I try not to sweat Raheem when he gets a  
little rough with me. He’s the cutest boy in  
school. I can’t keep him on no short leash.”

—*a short story by Sharon Flake*

### **Love Is Just Complicated**

—*a poem by Tupac Shakur*

### **A PLACE WITHOUT SHAME**

“Fear runs screaming out of the house. /  
Self-doubt crawls out the window. /  
Confidence dances with all who’ll have her.”

—*a poem by David Baraza*

### **Shoes** —*from a memoir by Gary Soto*

### **INDIAN EDUCATION**

“The high school I play for is nicknamed  
the ‘Indians,’ and I’m probably the only  
actual Indian ever to play for a team with  
such a mascot.” —*a short story by Sherman Alexie*

### **The Power of a Joke**

—*from an autobiography by Dick Gregory*

# become resilient

## IU

“I *have* to go to college,” I said. “I *am* going to college.” —*from a memoir by Tavis Smiley*

**Encouraged** —*a poem by Paul Laurence Dunbar*

## 12.....**KIPLING AND I\***

“The poem seemed to summarize the wisdom of all the sages that ever lived.”

—*from a memoir by Jesus Colón*

## 16.....**If\*** —*a poem by Rudyard Kipling*

## “I SHOULD BE DEAD”

“I am so grateful to be alive. I should be dead.”

—*from an oral history by Ladda Tammy Duckworth*

**A Soldier’s Arabic** —*a poem by Brian Turner*

## BEHIND BARS

“The best time to cry is at night, when the lights are out and someone is being beaten up and screaming for help.”

—*from a novel by Walter Dean Myers*

**Caged** —*from an autobiography by Malcolm X*

\* HIGHLIGHTED TITLES ARE EXCERPTED HERE.

# engage others

## 18..... **UNDERTAKER\***

“When a bullet enters the brain,  
the head explodes.” —a poem by Patricia Smith

## 26..... **Untitled\*** —a poem by Slayton Goodman

## **FEDERICO’S GHOST**

“The cropduster plane sprayed anyway, /  
floating a pesticide drizzle / over the  
pickers . . .” —a poem by Martín Espada

**Toxic Skies** —from a newspaper article by Ivan Mejia

## **A POEM FOR “MAGIC”**

“double-pump, scissor, vamp through  
space, hang in place / & put it all in the  
sucker’s face . . .” —a poem by Quincy Troupe

**Being Realistic** —a cartoon by Chip Bok

## **BOY SOLDIER**

“I would dream that a faceless gunman  
had tied me up and begun to slit my  
throat.” —from a memoir by Ishmael Beah

## **Street Soldier**

—from a memoir by Dashaun “Jiwe” Morris

\* HIGHLIGHTED TITLES ARE EXCERPTED HERE.

# build capacity

## NIGHT

“How was it possible that men, women, and children were being burned and that the world kept silent?”

—*from a memoir by Elie Wiesel*

**“We Must Take Sides”** —*from a speech by Elie Wiesel*

## DEAR FUTURE GENERATIONS

“Sorry for the mess / & what we did / to Earth” —*a poem by Luis Campos*

**Tadpoles** —*from a speech by Wangari Maathai*

## COME HELL OR HIGH WATER

“This couldn’t be the richest and most powerful nation on the globe, leaving behind some of its poorest citizens to fend for themselves.” —*nonfiction by Michael Eric Dyson*

## “I’m a Survivor”

—*from an interview with Gerard Broussard*

## 28.....BLACK RAGE\*

“then our voice will be / more powerful than a gun” —*from a song by Abiodun Oyewole*

**To Our People** —*a poem by Umar Bin Hassan*

## Read More by These Authors

## Glossary

# CHOP

I came into this world whole /  
and look what happened to me.

T

his is not about a pork chop  
or a lamb chop

This is about chop chop

You see when I extend my hand  
and you do not shake it

Chop chop

When I say something and you do not like  
the way it sounds

Chop chop

When I wear my pants a certain way  
and it causes you to frown

Chop chop

When I read like I need help

and you blame it on me instead of helping me

Chop chop

When I make an adolescent mistake

in your presence and you cast me away

Chop chop

When you start that anecdotal record

that grants me entry into that special type of  
education without putting my voice on record

Chop chop

When you begin to dislike me and believe

that I am dislikable

Chop chop


When you say that I do not love who I am

because you have not found a way to love me

Chop chop

When you leave me alone

and this cycle starts all over again

Chop chop  
When you cage me up  
Chop chop  
When you lock me out  
Chop chop  
When you leave me out there on my own  
Chop chop  
When you bury me too early  
Stop stop  
There is no more chopping,  
    because I have been chopped up.  
I came into this world whole  
and look what happened to me.  
Chop Chop 

*Alfred W. Tatum*



**ALFRED W. TATUM**

**GREW UP:** In the Ida B. Wells housing projects in Chicago, Illinois.

**LIFE'S WORK:** Inspiring young black men to read, write, and take control of their lives.

**INSPIRATION:** When he learned that African American males who struggle to read are more likely to end up in jail, he vowed to return to his neighborhood after college and teach eighth-grade English.

**DAY JOB:** Teaches literacy education at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

**HIGH PRAISE:** Winner of the 2006 James N. Britton Award from the National Council of Teachers of English.

**INFO ABOUT NUYORICAN LIT:**  
[alfredtatum.com](http://alfredtatum.com)

**PIECE OF HIS MIND:**

“Black men have always written to contribute to a healthy psyche or self-definition or even a better humanity. Writing provides a road map for becoming and doing.”



# WHY I WRITE POETRY

I have not always been a fan of poetry. Nah. In fact, I hated it and thought poetry an activity for the overly sensitive—and suckers. Suckers in the sense that I, a Black boy from the ghetto, would—could—never let my guard down long enough for you, the observer, to see me—naked—as I am. But the reality is that I had always, on the down low, dug poetry.

Once I started to write poetry,  
I felt free—and truly felt that I was,  
indeed, a writer. And how amazing it  
was, yo. To be able to say whatever I  
wanted, to push the door to my  
imagination and walk through, without  
fear, to those spaces I never knew  
existed.

*Kevin Powell* (1966– )

American activist, writer,  
and public speaker

# KIPLING AND I



This poem to me then seemed  
to summarize the wisdom of  
all the sages that ever lived.

**S**OMETIMES I PASS Debevoise Place at the  
corner of Willoughby Street . . . I look at the  
old wooden house, gray and ancient, the house  
where I used to live some forty years ago . . .

My room was on the second floor at the  
corner. On hot summer nights I would sit at the  
window reading by the electric light from the  
street lamp which was almost at a level with the  
window sill.

It was nice to come home late during the  
winter, look for some scrap of old newspaper,  
some bits of wood and a few chunks of coal and  
start a sparkling fire in the chunky fourlegged  
coal stove. I would be rewarded with an intimate

warmth as little by little the pigmy stove became alive puffing out its sides, hot and red, like the crimson cheeks of a Santa Claus.

My few books were in a soap box nailed to the wall. But my most prized possession in those days was a poem I had bought in a five and ten cent store on Fulton Street. (I wonder what has become of these poems, maxims and sayings of wise men that they used to sell at the five and ten cent stores?) The poem was printed on gold paper and mounted in a gilded frame ready to be hung in a conspicuous place in the house. I bought one of those fancy silken picture cords finishing in a rosette to match the color of the frame.

I was seventeen. This poem to me then seemed to summarize the wisdom of all the sages that ever lived in one poetical nutshell. It was what I was looking for, something to guide myself by, a way of life, a compendium of the wise, the true and the beautiful. All I had to do was to

## JESÚS COLÓN

LIVED: 1901–1974

GREW UP: Cayey, Puerto Rico.

EARLY EDUCATION:

Hung out at the cigar factory behind his house and listened to “readers,” who read stories and articles to workers.



NEW LIFE: Stowed away on a ship bound for New York City at age 16.

INSPIRATION: Seeing the racism and dangerous working conditions that Puerto Ricans faced in New York City led Colón to write about their lives.

DAY JOB: Newspaper columnist, publisher of Hispanic literature, and frequent candidate for public office.

HIGH PRAISE: Colón is called the “Father of the Nuyorican Movement”—an explosion of literature and music by Puerto Ricans living in New York in the late 1960s.

INFO ABOUT NUYORICAN LITERATURE:

[www.nuyorican.org](http://www.nuyorican.org)

THEY SAY:

“Colón talks not only to the working people alone, nor to the Puerto Rican people alone, but to the American people as a whole.”

—*Sidney Finkelstein, music and cultural critic*

# IF

If you can keep your head when all about you  
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,  
If you can trust yourself  
    when all men doubt you,  
But make allowance for their doubting too;  
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,  
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,  
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,  
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream—  
    and not make dreams your master;  
If you can think—  
    and not make thoughts your aim;  
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster  
And treat those two impostors just the same;  
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken  
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,  
Or watch the things you gave your life to,  
    broken,  
And stoop and build 'em up  
    with worn-out tools:



If you can make one heap of all your winnings  
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,  
And lose, and start again at your beginnings  
And never breathe a word about your loss;  
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew  
To serve your turn long after they are gone,  
And so hold on when there is nothing in you  
Except the Will which says to them:  
“Hold on!”

If you can talk with crowds  
and keep your virtue,  
Or walk with Kings—  
nor lose the common touch,  
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,  
If all men count with you, but none too much;  
If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,  
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,  
  
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!

*Rudyard Kipling* (1865–1936)  
British writer whose works included  
*The Jungle Book* and *Just So Stories*



# UNDERTAKER

When a bullet enters the  
brain, the head explodes.

**W**hen a bullet enters the brain,  
the head explodes.

I can think of no softer warning for the mothers  
who sit doubled before my desk,  
knotting their smooth brown hands,  
and begging, fix my boy, fix my boy.

*Here's his high school picture.*

And the smirking, mildly mustachioed player  
in the crinkled snapshot  
looks nothing like the plastic bag of boy  
stored and dated in the cold room downstairs.

In the picture, he is cocky and chiseled,  
clutching the world by the balls. I know the look.  
Now he is f ap of cheek,  
slivers of jawbone, a surprised eye,  
assorted teeth, bloody tufts of napped hair.  
The building blocks of my business.

So I swallow hard, turn the photo face down  
and talk numbers instead. The high price  
of miracles startles the still-young woman,  
but she is prepared. I know that she has sold  
everything she owns, that cousins and uncles  
have emptied their empty bank accounts,  
that she dreams of her baby  
in tuxedoed satin, f awless in an open casket,  
a cross or blood red rose tacked to his fingers,  
his halo set at a cocky angle.  
I write a figure on a piece of paper  
and push it across to her  
while her chest heaves with hoping.



Fix my boy; he was a good boy.  
Make him the way he was.

She stares at the number, pulls in  
a slow weepy breath: “*Jesus.*”

But Jesus isn't on this payroll. I work alone  
until the dim insistence of morning,  
bent over my grisly puzzle pieces, gluing,  
stitching, creating a chin with a brushstroke.  
I plop glass eyes into rigid sockets,  
then carve eyelids from a forearm, an inner thigh.  
I plump shattered skulls, and paint the skin  
to suggest warmth, an impending breath.

I reach into collapsed cavities to rescue  
a tongue, an ear. Lips are never easy to recreate.

And I try not to remember the stories,  
the tales the mothers must bring me  
to ease their own hearts. *Oh*, they cry,  
*my Ronnie, my Willie, my Michael, my Chico.*  
It was self-defense. He was on his way home,  
a dark car slowed down, they must have thought  
he was someone else. He stepped between  
two warring gang members at a party.  
Really, he was trying to get off the streets,  
trying to pull away from the crowd.  
He was just trying to help a friend.  
He was in the wrong place at the wrong time.  
*Fix my boy; he was a good boy*  
*Make him the way he was.*  
But I have explored the jagged gaps  
in the boy's body, smoothed the angry edges  
of bulletholes. I have touched him in places

Really, he was trying to get  
off the streets, trying to pull  
away from the crowd.


no mother knows, and I have birthed  
his new face. I know he believed himself  
invincible, that he most likely hissed  
“F--- you, man” before the bullets lifted him  
off his feet. I try not to imagine  
his swagger, his lizard-lidded gaze,  
his young mother screaming into the phone.

She says she will find the money, and I know  
this is the truth that fuels her, forces her  
to place one foot in front of the other.  
Suddenly, I want to take her down  
to the chilly room, open the bag  
and shake its terrible bounty onto the  
gleaming steel table. I want her to see him,

to touch him, to press her lips to the flap of cheek.  
The woman needs to wither, finally, and move on.

We both jump as the phone rattles in its hook.

I pray it's my wife, a bill collector,  
a wrong number.

But the wide, questioning silence on the other end  
is too familiar. Another mother needing a miracle.  
Another homeboy coming home. 

*Patricia Smith*



.....

## PATRICIA SMITH

**BORN:** December 30, 1946

**GREW UP:** West Side of Chicago, “The part,” she says, “that everyone tells you to stay away from.”



### IN THE SPOTLIGHT:

Doesn't just write poetry, but performs it too—since the early days of the Poetry Slam movement in the 1980s. “Her words will wash you or wash you away,” says fellow poet Terrance Hayes.

**DAY JOB:** Teaches creative writing at universities, prisons, public schools, shelters, and centers for senior citizens.

**HIGH PRAISE:** Winner of the Carl Sandburg Award; finalist for the National Book Award.

**WEBSITE:** [wordwoman.ws](http://wordwoman.ws)

### SHE SAYS:

“There is nothing I won't write about, and nothing I won't say out loud. I can't [place] limits on my voice. We do only have one life, and silence is not the way to live it.”



# UNTITLED

click clack pow  
officer down  
click clack pow  
innocent child  
click clack pow  
someones brotha  
why don't we stop killing  
each other

*Slayton Goodman*

Student Author

September 12, 2008



# BLACK


# RAGE

then our voice will be /  
more powerful than a gun

there are bombs standing  
on the corners of the cities  
waiting to explode  
at the slightest touch  
baggy shadow street boys  
stand cocked ready to fire  
their eyes are grenades

they are warriors looking for  
a rite of passage  
they are young lions  
enchanted by the sound of their roar  
they are diamonds  
treated like worthless stones

they are rivers  
with nowhere to run  
they are dreams unfulfilled  
desires buried in the remains  
of an abandoned soul

they are the beauty of spring  
blinded by the snow storms of winter  
soon they will see their beauty  
their strength, their love  
and like the rivers flow into sea  
they will unite as one  
then our voice will be  
more powerful than a gun  
and as we speak  
we'll get things done 

*Abiodun Oyewole*

**ABIODUN OYEWOLE**

**BORN:** February 25, 1948

**GREW UP:** In Queens, a borough of New York City.

**REBORN:** Changed his name from Charles Davis after attending a Yoruba temple as a teenager.

**EARLY EDUCATION:**

Jazz, gospel, and the poems of Langston Hughes.

**TURNING POINT:**

Formed the music/poetry group The Last Poets in 1968, at a memorial for Malcolm X. "We were angry and we had something to say. We addressed the language. We just put it right in front of your face."

**HIGH PRAISE:** The Last Poets are considered the grandfathers of hip-hop.

**DAY JOB:** Teaches at Columbia University and in New York City public schools.

**WEBSITE:** [myspace.com/abiodunoyewole](http://myspace.com/abiodunoyewole)

**HE SAYS:**

"Back [in the 1970s], I wanted to see everything burned and people hanged. Now my whole thing is, we have to see how we can be the greatest part of us, which is the healing part of us."

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