

CAVE CANEM FOUNDATION, INC

Literary Balms: A Virtual Community Writing Project
Week Four: April 13, 2020

In keeping with Cave Canem's mission to develop Black poets and foster community, *Literary Balms: A Virtual Community Writing Project* is an initiative to help keep writers engaged with their writing process and virtually connected with each other during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Literary Balms* offers three writing prompts generated by Cave Canem fellows and poetry-related suggested readings. We encourage you to share your experiences with these prompts on our social media channels as we release them publicly each week, using #LiteraryBalms and tagging us @CaveCanemPoets. Please return to our website, cavecanempoets.org, for a digital archive of weekly prompts.

The Writing

Prompt #10

Write a poem in the voice of an object that is a part of your everyday life right now. Writing from the perspective of that object, consider how that object might talk about the process of its own creation and its daily existence. What might that object say if it could speak to people—or specifically to you? How would that object think about kindness and compassion, about fear, difficulty, and obsession?

At some point in the poem, perhaps at the beginning, end, or smack dab in the middle, challenge yourself to include at least one line that consists of one-syllable words only. This last element, the line composed of only one-syllable words, is in homage to Evie Shockley and an exercise she asked us to do at the Retreat in 2018. Voice and tone shifted in such unexpected ways when we forced ourselves into one-syllable words—what will that shift do to the voice of your object?

Contributed by Cave Canem fellow Aaron Coleman.

Prompt #11

Take your favorite poem and use it as a word bank to create a new work. It can be a response to the poem, it can be a remix of the poem, it can be made into a prose poem or have couplets, as long as ALL the words are used.

Contributed by Cave Canem fellow Teri Ellen Cross Davis.

Prompt #12

Read the poem "[Kissing in Vietnamese](#)" by [Ocean Vuong](#) and meditate on how its kisses are stories within stories. Ask yourself the following questions: How many kisses will you have in a lifetime? How can a kiss reflect culture and memory? What does that kiss look like? If you only had one kiss left to give, what would it contain? Finally, if your kiss could house language, what would it say? Then make a list of 10 kisses you have given or received and write a poem describing what each kiss meant.

Contributed by Cave Canem fellow Cynthia Manick.

Aaron Coleman is the author of *Threat Come Close* (Four Way Books, 2018) winner of the Great Lakes Colleges Association New Writers Award, and *St. Trigger* (Button, 2016), selected by Adrian Matejka for the Button Poetry Prize. Aaron is a PhD Candidate in Comparative Literature at Washington University in St. Louis. His research focuses on translation's role in vivifying the relationships between poets of the African Diaspora in the Americas.

Teri Ellen Cross Davis is the author of *a more perfect Union*, winner of the 2019 The Journal/Charles B. Wheeler Poetry Prize, and *Haint* (Gival Press, 2016), winner of the 2017 Ohioana Book Award for Poetry. She's a Cave Canem fellow, member of the Black Ladies Brunch Collective and lives in Maryland.

Cynthia Manick is the author of *Blue Hallelujahs* (Black Lawrence Press, 2016) and editor of *Soul Sister Revue: A Poetry Compilation* (Jamii Publishing, 2019). She has received fellowships from Cave Canem, Hedgebrook, MacDowell Colony and Château de la Napoule among others. Manick is founder of the reading series Soul Sister Revue; and her work has appeared in *Callaloo*, *Poem-A-Day*, *Kweli*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Wall Street Journal* and elsewhere.

The Readings

Cave Canem faculty [Lucille Clifton and Sonia Sanchez](#) read poems and discuss their careers with fellow Eisa Davis at an October 2001 Cave Canem Legacy Conversation.

In this 1997 conversation with Farah Griffin, Michael Magee and Kristen Gallagher, Cave Canem fellow and faculty [Harryette Mullen](#) discusses the influence of language, race and gender on her early work.

While a 2017 Kelly Writers House Fellow, [Nathaniel Mackey](#) talks about his influences and poetic approach with Al Filreis.

Cave Canem Foundation, Inc. is the premier institution for supporting the many voices of Black poetry: the home of the nation's largest collection of Black writers. Formed in 1996 as a response to the lack of support and resources for poets of African descent, Cave Canem has become the national leader within the poetry community moving toward greater racial diversity, inclusion and accessibility in the field. The organization is entering a pivotal moment in its history and future as we prepare to celebrate our 25th Anniversary. In 24 years, Cave Canem has become an influential movement with a renowned faculty, high achieving national fellowship of over 400 and a workshop community of 950 plus.



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