

CAVE CANEM FOUNDATION, INC

Literary Balms: A Virtual Community Writing Project

Week One: March 23, 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](http://cavecanempoets.org), for a digital archive of weekly prompts.

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The Writing

Prompt #1

Write an ode to your pet peeve (in other words, write a poem praising something that annoys you). Look outside your immediate perspective. Think: what are the small annoyances that you encounter throughout your day? In what ways are those annoyances human? In what ways do those annoyances add depth to life and the world? In what ways can you look at what annoys you with understanding and/or appreciation?

*Contributed by Cave Canem fellow Alexa Patrick.*

Prompt #2

Write an epistolary poem addressed to the imaginary friend, pet or favorite comfort item you had as a child. The poem should begin with "There are always more things to tell you..." and should also before the poem ends, include a moment where you recall one of the last times you've cried (not exclusive to sad tears).

*Contributed by Cave Canem fellow Karisma Price.*

Prompt #3

Watch [Put It On the Line](#), a collaboration with visual artist Carolina González Valencia, and write a poem in response to the question.

*Contributed by Cave Canem fellow Arisa White.*

**Alexa Patrick** is a singer and poet from Connecticut and a graduate of American University. She is the 2019 Head Coach of Split This Rock's D.C. Youth Slam Team. A coach at various universities, Alexa has also taught at The University of the District of Columbia and the Center for Creative Youth at Wesleyan University. She has been published in *CRWN Magazine*, Split This Rock's *The Quarry*, and *The BreakBeat Poets Vol. 2: Black Girl Magic*.

**Karisma Price** is a Cave Canem fellow. Born and raised in New Orleans, LA, she holds an MFA in poetry from New York University. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Poetry*, *Four Way Review*, *The Adroit Journal*, and elsewhere. She is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor at Tulane University in New Orleans.

**Arisa White** is the co-author of *Biddy Mason Speaks Up*, the second book in the Fighting for Justice series for young readers, and forthcoming in 2021 from Augury Books is her auto-poetic narrative, *Who's Your Daddy?* Arisa serves on the board of directors for Foglifter and Nomadic Press and is an assistant professor of creative writing at Colby College.

## The Readings

In this episode of the [Poetry Foundation's Poetry Off the Shelf, Cave Canem co-founder Toi Derricotte](#) discusses her evolution as a poet up to her recently published volume "I": New and Selected Poems (2019).

Included in Orpheus in the Bronx: Essays on Identity, Politics, and the Freedom of Poetry (2007), [Reginald Shepherd's "Why I Write"](#) is a meditation on the poet's early and later pull toward poetry.

This recording of [Cave Canem fellow and former Executive Director Nicole Sealey reading from Ordinary Beast \(2017\)](#) at James Madison University's Furious Flower Poetry Center includes a dynamic voicing of ["Cento for the Night I Said, 'I Love You'"](#) at 20:00.

*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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