

CAVE CANEM FOUNDATION, INC

Literary Balms: A Virtual Community Writing Project
Week Six: April 27, 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 #16

Think of a life changing, important or transitional time in your life. Think about a time when the same event has occurred over and over again. Think of a series of poems you just can't stop writing about. Search your rolodex or notes of memories for a "thing" that has happened...at least 9 times. The format for the "Nines" poem is as follows: Nine events or occurrences (nine places, nine moves, nine jobs, nine birthdays, nine ancestors, nine months, nine years, nine days, nine heartbreaks, nine blessings, etc.). Nine lines per stanza and nine words per line. One line per stanza must be exactly nine syllables.

Contributed by Cave Canem fellow Anastacia-Reneé.

Prompt #17

Write a verso using your "left-hand notes" (from your phone, notebook, a napkin scrap, CVS receipt, etc). Create a "manager" of your left-hand notes (cashier, accountant, etc.), who you will address directly. Give them a color that reflects the tone of your interactions. Include three answers to the question: how have you forgiven yourself today? Feel free to include the "managers" non-verbal reactions to your answers. Include one thing that grows in the natural world. Consider the line "I don't want to hear anything more about waiting." Worry less about logical sense-making than sense-making in the body.

Contributed by Cave Canem fellow Aricka Foreman.

Prompt #18

This exercise merges two poetic forms into one. A contrapuntal is a poem written in two separate columns that can be read as individual pieces as well as one singular, collective poem. An erasure is a form of found poetry or found art created by erasing words from an existing text in prose or verse and framing the result on the page as a poem. To create a contrapuntal erasure, combine two found pieces into one. Find a song, speech or poem—any written work which would then be merged together to be read as one piece. Cite your sources.

Contributed by Cave Canem fellow Rico Fredrick.

Anastacia-Reneé is a writer, TEDx Speaker, Deep End Podcast co-host and interdisciplinary artist. The recipient of the 2018 James W. Ray Distinguished Artist Award for Washington Artist (Literary), Seattle Civic Poet (2017-2019) and Poet-in-Residence at Hugo House (2015-2017), she has received fellowships and residencies from Cave Canem, Hedgebrook, VONA, Artist Trust, Jack Straw, Ragdale, Mineral School, Hypatia in the Woods and The New Orleans Writers Residency. Anastacia-Reneé's work has been published in *Foglifter*, *Cascadia Magazine*, *Pinwheel*, *The Fight and the Fiddle*, *Glow*, *The A-Line*, *Ms. Magazine* and a host of others.

Aricka Foreman is the author of the chapbook [Dream with a Glass Chamber](#) (YesYes Books, 2016) and [Salt Body Shimmer](#) (YesYes Books, August 2020). She has received fellowships from Cave Canem, Callaloo and the Millay Colony for the Arts. Her work has appeared in *RHINO*, *Buzzfeed*, *Catapult*, *Vinyl* and *Furious Flower: Seeding the Future of African American Poetry* (Northwestern University Press, 2020) among others. She lives in Chicago, IL.

Rico Frederick is a graphic designer and the author of the book *Broken Calypsonian* (Penmanship Books, 2014). He holds an MFA in Writing from Pratt Institute and is a Cave Canem Fellow, Poets House Emerging Poets Fellow and the first poet to represent all four original New York City poetry venues at the National Poetry Slam. His artistic work has been featured in the *New York Times*, *Muzzle*, *Epiphany*, *No Dear Magazine*, The Big Apple Film Festival and elsewhere. Rico is a Trinidadian transplant, lives in New York, loves gummy bears and scribbles poems on the back of maps in the hope they will take him someplace new.

The Readings

In a recent essay, [“Conspicuous Erudition,” Jerome Ellison Murphy](#) provides a critical analysis of Black poets employing poetics on their own terms—as definers instead of the defined.

Camara Brown, Edwin Torres and Brooke O’Harra talk with PoemTalk producer-host Al Filreis about Cave Canem fellow [Tracie Morris’s “Slave Sho to Video aka Black but Beautiful.”](#)

[Robert Hayden’s poetry is the subject of this essay](#) by Lavelle Porter, who revisits the controversies regarding the poet’s career and writing

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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