

WRITERS IN RESIDENCE



Earth Was Cool

2019

*For all youth in Ohio who are incarcerated so
their voices may be freed, heard, and
understood as a call to reform the juvenile
justice system.*

Table of Contents

| | |
|----------------------------------|----|
| Letter from the Program Director | 2 |
| Mission | 4 |
| Impact Report | 5 |
| Cohorts | 6 |
| Letter from the Cohort | 7 |
| Residents' Creative Writing | 9 |
| Acknowledgments | 22 |
| Vision | 23 |

Letter from the Program Director

Dear reader,

In Ohio, there are close to 2,100 youth in the state's custody according to the Sentencing Project's report from 2015. Ohio's Department of Youth Services recorded a daily facility population of 530 juveniles at all of their prisons and treatment centers, 53% of juveniles are black, and the county with the highest admissions is Cuyahoga with approximately 20%. The Justice Policy Institute highlighted in their 2014 report that it costs approximately \$200,000 to incarcerate a juvenile for a year compared to approximately \$10,000 to educate a youth for a year in Ohio.

These facts only illuminate a small cog of the juvenile justice system's overall mechanical design that for many youth break down their contact with the outside world, their hopes and dreams, and their human dignity.

For 12 weeks, our residents produced creative writing during workshops designed to teach them about different genres from diverse authors so their voices may be freed, heard, and understood by you as a call to reform the juvenile justice system because these are just kids locked inside cages.

Before you read this chapbook, I want you to open your mind and your heart because our residents have done the same to share their work; I want you to separate our residents from qualifiers such as juvenile, delinquent, felon, convict, gang-banger, and criminal because these terms don't define our residents. Then, after you read this chapbook, I want you to ask questions and search for answers; I want you to share this chapbook with everyone around you; and I want you to remember what my mentor Dr. Philip Metres told me: "Their souls are the art."

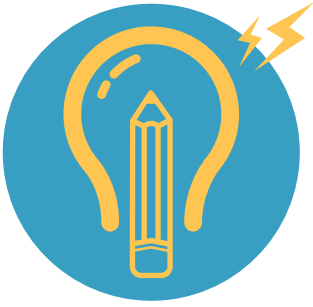
Despite being broken down by the system, by life, by fear, our residents managed to transfer their souls through writing for you to read.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Zachary Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large loop at the beginning and a long tail.

Zachary Thomas
Program Director for Writers in Residence

Mission



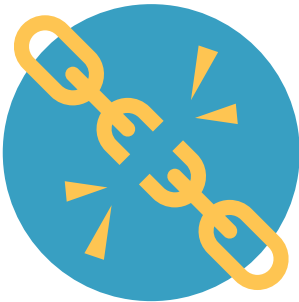
TEACH

creative writing to youth who are incarcerated in jails and prisons.



FOSTER

a genuine, long-lasting relationship with the residents.



FREE

their voices through the distribution and showcase of their creative writing in published chapbooks shared with the community.

Impact Report

This impact report summarizes all of our cohort's work during the fall semester from August to December:

4 Cohorts

29+ Student Volunteers

66+ Residents

72+ Hours

These totals highlight our program's expansion and development with more cohorts from colleges and universities employing our mission and vision at juvenile detention centers across Ohio. If we compare these totals with the impact report from 2017, which marks the origin of the program, we would see a tripling and quadrupling difference in the number of residents, student volunteers, and service hours.

Visit writersnresidence.org/impact to learn more.

Cohorts

- 1 John Carroll University at the Cuyahoga Hills JCF
- 2 Oberlin College at the Lorain County JDH
- 3 Hiram College at the Portage-Geauga County JDC
- 4 College of Wooster at the Indian River JCF



Letter from the Cohort

Dear reader,

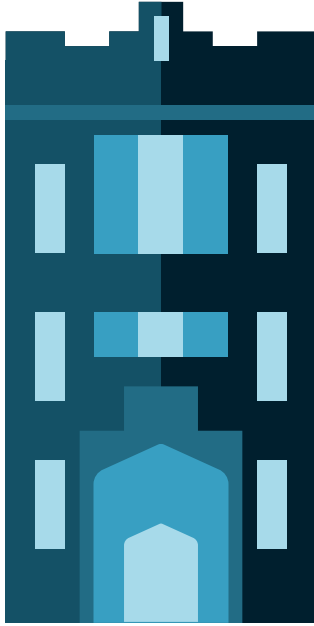
Writers in Residence has been an experience like no other. This experience as a whole has truly been astounding because these young men are so inspiring and so creative, and we've really enjoyed helping them see how creative (and funny!) they are. Our time with them is routinely our favorite part of the week and is absolutely the time we laugh the hardest.

We've all grown together as individuals, friends, and teachers for the last 12-weeks. We think this program has helped give the residents more confidence in their ideas and being more willing to share their "true personalities" with others. We've really enjoyed learning about their goals for their future – whether that be going to college, owning a house, becoming an author, mechanic, or general contractor, or simply having a dog. We truly hope that they go on to do amazing things once they're released.

Amazed at the depth and individuality of responses from everyone in this cohort, we truly care for the residents. As we go through our everyday lives, we see things that remind us of them - like any of our other friends. Since we've also learned more about the prison system through this experience, we find ourselves worrying about them as well, as they are our friends now and people that deserve to be seen and heard. We're so thankful that these young men have let us be a part of their lives, and we're excited to work with them again next semester!

Sincerely,
The College of Wooster Cohort

P.S. The title of our chapbook, *Earth Was Cool*, was a response from one of the residents to a prompt given during one of the creative writing workshops focused on eulogies and elegies. “If he was here with us today, he would probably say that Earth was cool.” The residents’ creative writing published in this chapbook present reflections on their lives that discuss the pain of rejection, the yearning for freedom and better times, and unrequited love.



College of Wooster

Indian River JCF

Rejection

Colton

I am gay
To this day
People speak it's not okay
but hey?

Life to me, isn't fair.
I wish that all were equal.
To be who they want without a care. But
people make it seem illegal.

I stare every day at my reflection
Scared of once again, rejection
But I'll still be the first to make an objection
And a suggestion.

Really, rejection is failure.
It's simply a jailer.
But there's hope in a bailer.
Really, in the end, I'm me until the end.

Rejection, acceptance.
Who really should care.
All I want is to fit in
When will that begin?
But it'll happen again.
But the worst, I have rejection within.

Jail Thinking

Joseph

I'm locked up in jail
still around the same people
can't go home

Today is Thursday
10 more months 'til I go home
time for bed

Chillin' in my cell
gettin' my head right this morn
strap up shoes

Need to call mom dukes
see how my brothers doing
one message: be strong

Haiku

Colton

See you but you don't
See me like I'm seeing you
I think it is love

With chocolate eyes
and skin that feels like cotton
I'm falling in deep

Your face in my head
You are stuck in it all day
Driving me crazy

Voice like music bells
Ringing in my ears and head
Swallows me in whole

Falling fast unknown
Not knowing what I'm into
A bright void I'm in

Breath falls so short
My knees begin to grow weak
I am falling down

I hate where I am
There's no escape to this all
I'm lost so help me

Running water sound
Splashes around in my mind
It makes me thirsty

2Pacalypse

Johnson

4 meals every day,
but still hungry for freedom,
back to the cell now.

Chickens want to fly,
but their wings just can't do it.
False dreams can hurt you.

In jail for birthdays
so I can't be down no more.
Keep your head up man.

Untitled

Jordan, John, Morgan, and Sydney

In Cinci

Jordan: Bye! I'll come back!

John John: I'm sick that you're leaving me.

(They dab. Jordan leaves in the car packed with stuff.)

In Florida

Morgan: Welcome to Florida State! FSU!

Sydney: We're so happy to have you. Do you need help carrying your stuff in?
Here's your room!

(Jordan has been in school for a week. He's asleep in his room.)

John John: (Knocking on the door.) Sup my brother?

Jordan: Sup my boy? Why you comin' in here?

John John: I ain't gonna lie because it's Florida. We're gonna go to the club,
meet some people, and take it from there?

(Jordan and John John are walking to the beach together on the dock. Morgan
and Sydney are there.)

Sydney: Hey, Jordan right?

Jordan: Yeah! This is John John.

Morgan: How was your first week

Jordan: Cool. Getting to know people.

(John John sips his drink and falls off the dock.)

Morgan: Oh my God! What the f**k just happened?

(The water starts glowing.)

Jordan: What are we gonna do!?!?

(John John comes out of the water carrying the dock and carrying Jordan all the way back to Cinci.)

Men in Black

Johnson

Earth was cool, but hell probably isn't better. I'm not praying on Johnson's downfall, but he made mistakes. God might not wanna kick it with him forever. He was funny, fat, and friendly. I call those the faithful F's. Miss you!

High Life

Johnson

I miss high school. Ain't went there since the beginning of my sophomore year. I don't know why I miss it but something about it was fun and chill. I miss study hall naps and waiting for school to be over.

King Joe Baby

Joseph

I was down my cousin's house and we was walking around and my lil cousin was talking to this girl and then we went back to their house so my lil cousin went upstairs with his girl for a couple of minutes and then her mom came to my lil cousin's house looking for her. It was around 11 at night when that all happened. I see her oldest sister after that night [and] the lil sister came back over and I ask her how old was her sister and she said 17. I walked to her house and started talking to her. I ended up getting her Facebook and we started talking a lot. After a couple of months later, I ended up going to jail. When I was in there for a couple of months, I asked her for her cousin's number and she got mad. After that I told her I wanted to be friends and I never called her again. Then a couple of months later, I called her and she told me she got another boyfriend and we still can be friends. Then I called her again 2 months later, she told me she was pregnant and it hurt so I never called her back.

Life Insurance

Johnson

Death would be the only thing
I would black out because it's
always getting someone.

Men in Da Hood

Johnson

Rickey: Why you shoot him?

Sosa: I told him not to move, dumba*s thought I was playin'.

Rickey: We going to prison, it's over man. Oh my god!

Sosa: Stop being a h*e. Come on help me pick him up. We'll take him to a country ditch or something.

Rickey: Hell no, I'm outta here. We gotta run away. I'm a tell my Pops and see what he thinks I should do.

Sosa: (Smacks Rickey.) N**ga you not telling no body. Come over here and help me with the body.

Rickey: No I'm leaving.

Sosa: (Cocking the gun, he shoots Rickey three times.) Dumba*s. I told you to help me. I'm not going to prison for you.

Rickey: (Breathing hard.) You just shot me.

Sosa: What you think was gonna happen, can't go back now.

(Sosa shoots Rickey one last time.)

Acknowledgments

We have to thank the following individuals that have supported our program with either their time, talents, or treasure because without them our program wouldn't exist.

Our residents

Our student volunteers

- Ellie
- Liz
- Jessica
- Rose
- Baraa
- Eric
- Natasha
- Olivia
- Joseph
- Laila
- Uma
- Maeve
- Cat
- Megan
- Savannah
- Sydney
- Morgan
- Sierra
- Jenna
- Madison
- Alexia
- Quinn
- Callie
- Graham
- Naomi

Our advisors, community partners, and academic institutions

- Anisfield- Wolf Book Awards – Karen, Courtenay, Lillian
- John Carroll University – Phil, Debby, Anna, all faculty/staff
- Oberlin College
- Hiram College – Mary, all faculty/staff
- College of Wooster – Anne, all faculty/staff
- Cuyahoga Hills – Erin, Scott, Mark, Jennifer, all of the staff
- Lorain Country JDH – Dave, Mark, all of the staff
- Portage-Geauga JDC – Jenn, all of the staff
- Indian River – Andrea, Aness, all of the staff

Our graphic designer

- Rose

Our founding members

- Rachel
- Michalena
- Anthony
- Zach

Vision



We work towards reducing our residents' recidivism rates by increasing their literacy levels through creative writing that gives them the ability to critically think, creatively express, and independently manage their stress, anxiety, and trauma. As our program grows, we will develop a pipeline between the “inside” and the “outside” for our residents to continue their writing and mentorship with our volunteers as well as benefit from our support network. Finally, we will start conversations with the help of our residents' creative writing to remind our communities about this marginalized population that deserves to be treated as human beings with dignity and educate our communities about the juvenile justice system to create change.

Donate

Your donation will allow us to continue teaching creative writing to youth who are incarcerated in jails and prisons; fostering a genuine, long-lasting relationship with the residents; and freeing their voices through the distribution and showcase of their creative writing in our published chapbooks shared with the community.

But beyond supporting our mission and vision, your donation will also allow us to:

- Educate our communities about the juvenile justice system.
- Support our residents re-entering back into society.
- Sustain our cohorts' ability to serve youth who are incarcerated.

Visit writersnresidence.org/donate or scan the code with your phone's camera below to donate!

