

Underground Writing - Newsletter

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Heather | book launch reading

Potential

Greetings, Friends.

A few weeks ago in *Juvenile Detention*, we discussed “Potential,” a poem written a few years ago by Heather, a student from our YMCA Oasis Daylight Center site. I love the poem because it allows the reader to witness a self-realization in real time.

Potential

I sit in a grief stricken house
mindlessly pushing buttons on a half-broken controller.
I ponder about the bad things it's overheard
and wonder if that's why it's so broken.

Somehow it still works.
And, I bet, it even enjoys having people to use it.

Maybe it's not so broken.
It has potential.

Maybe I'm not so broken.

I'd like to suggest that Heather started out writing this poem with little idea where it was heading. Further, I'd suggest that it was in the very act of writing that the poet nearly stumbled into what James Joyce coined as an epiphany in literature—a sudden



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revelation with symbolic value. In this case, however, the literary seems to overlap with the personal. The beauty of repetition and language unspool to reveal a thought so blunt with truth that I imagine the poet stopped the poem not only because it was done, but also because she was stunned by what she'd discovered. A simple writing prompt had harnessed the mystery of language to reveal the mystery of being. By moving forward line by line into the unknown, Heather learned something vitally important about herself.

Back to juvenile detention. When we discussed the poem as a group, I told the youth I saw real potential in all of them. After doing some writing—about potential, inner strength, their future—the workshop came to a conclusion. One of the young men stayed after class to talk, while the guard waited by the door. The student handed me his piece of paper. “That’s some real life there,” he said. “Right there,” he said again, pointing to his response to the poem: “How do I know if I have potential? What if I don’t? Can someone know they have potential or does it depend on what others say? Do I have potential?”

A few days later I saw the youth and asked if he'd been thinking about the poem anymore. He told me he'd been thinking about it quite a bit. He pointed at me and told me I was the only person that had ever told him he had potential.

I relate this story because it indicates to me why Underground Writing exists in the first place. We exist—and all our teachers teach—to affirm students and their voices in contexts where such voices are often not heard, or are ignored, or are silenced. We talk about writing as an art form, we introduce students to great literature from all eras. We exist to affirm students' potential—each and every student. And we exist to provide a space in which the act of writing as an art form can become, concurrently, a tool for life. Writing as entrance into mystery, into epiphany, into what might be called transformative exploration.

Thanks to all of you reading this—our supporters, grant providers, encouragers, volunteers, donors—our students continue to have a chance for such transformation. And we as organization, as we grow, continue to realize our potential is seen, facilitated, and realized in community with you all. Thank you for your camaraderie!

Gratefully,



Matt Malyon
Executive Director

[writing.](#)



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News & Updates



Welcome, New Board Members!

We are excited to welcome two new board members to the team: Anaelsin Lopez and Heather Malcolm. **Anaelsin Lopez** was a student with us from 2015-2022. She is an alumna, and recently joined the board as our first Student Representative. In addition to being able to provide a student's perspective, we see this as an affirmation of Anaelsin as a person and a leader in our community. She also brings a love of the work we're doing: "Underground Writing workshops allowed me to express myself on paper, which led to my work being published in two anthologies, *What No One Ever Tells You* and *When the Dust Rises* . . . Starting with one writing workshop when I was 13 years old, Underground Writing opened the space to a support system that pushed me to life-changing opportunities." Anaelsin is currently pursuing her undergraduate degree locally, and plans to enroll at the University of Washington in the fall. **Heather Malcolm** was born and raised in Seattle, and moved to Skagit County in 2010. She is a second year Law student in Seattle University's part-time Flex program, and works part-time as a Human Resources consultant. Prior to entering law school in the fall of 2021, she enjoyed a 25 year HR career, primarily working in small publicly traded biopharmaceutical companies. She has been involved in non-profit work since 1994, including serving on the board of four different non-profit organizations. She is passionate about writing and reading, and is a frequent participant in writing workshops and conferences both locally and nationally.

We also want to give shout outs to our continuing board members, who continue to serve with passion, insight, and skill: **Isela Martinez Shouse** (Health Coordinator, Skagit County Public Health), **Armando Ruiz** (Dean of Students, Mount Vernon High School), **Jennifer Pitner** (JK Pitner Consulting),

and **Matt Malyon** (Executive Director, Underground Writing)



Thanks and shout outs!

We are honored and grateful to announce that we recently received a Working Washington grant. A big boost for us, the grant will be used for organizational development, deepening programming, supporting staff, and contracting with a grant writer for the year ahead. Shout outs and deep gratitude to the [Washington State Department of Commerce](#).

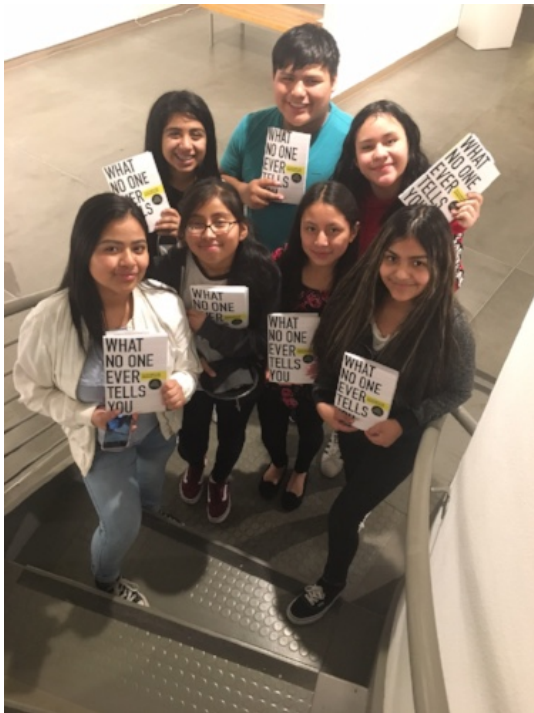


Letters to a Young Inmate

Later this year we are planning to launch the *Letters to a Young Inmate* initiative, a writing curriculum that takes shape as a series of letters in booklet form, written from older people experiencing incarceration to youth in juvenile detention. Delayed through the Covid-19 era, we are looking forward to the initiative making its way out into the world. [We're also pleased to announce that the initiative now has a brief promo film trailer, viewable on our website here.](#)

"POST" - COVID-19 ERA UPDATE

We continue to prioritize student safety by adhering to our workshop sites' required Covid-19 precautions. Currently, we are doing in-person workshops at some of our sites, and fewer in-person workshops overall. We also continue to create e-deliverable workshops for sites not meeting in person. In addition to the programs mentioned above, we are publishing students on social media via student writing highlights from our workshops, as well as the [One Page](#) publication opportunity for re/vision inquirers.



[Students | Migrant Leaders Club]

Unlocking creativity through writing workshops and voice amplification for at-need and underrepresented students, to assist in the restoration of communities, the imagination, and individual lives.

* We serve migrant, incarcerated, recovery, and other at-need communities in Washington.

* We focus on making an impact inside our local community, and inspiring outside it.

Our sites:

Skagit Co. Juvenile Detention

Youth | Weekly workshop site

Mount Vernon Migrant Leaders Club

Mount Vernon School District

Youth | Collaborative projects site

Skagit Valley Recovery Community

Adults | Monthly workshop site

YMCA Oasis Daylight Center

Youth | Monthly workshop site

Skagit Co. Community Justice Center

Adults | Weekly workshop site

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