

Underground Writing - Newsletter

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Tearing Down Walls

Jennifer Morison Hendrix | Teaching Writer

Playwright/Director/Advisor for *The Hidden Truth: Breaking the Wall*

In the spring of 2018, members of the Mount Vernon Migrant Leaders Club accepted an invitation to travel to New York City to see a musical at The Public Theatre. The play, *Miss You Like Hell* by Quiara Alegría Hudes, explores the damage and heartbreak that US immigration policy has inflicted on families like theirs. Inspired by their experience, the Club decided to turn their annual spring showcase, *The Hidden Truth*, into a theatrical event.



Order our
first anthology of



student writing.



Underground Writing had been collaborating with the Migrant Leaders Club since 2015 by leading regular writing workshops and helping with the production of *The Hidden Truth*. This year we committed our workshops to developing material for both the upcoming show and this new anthology, the follow-up to *DreamFields*, which was published in 2012.



Throughout the fall of 2018, students wrote and rewrote dramatic monologues, short scenes, poetry, and rap lyrics. Rehearsals began after winter break, and we worked together to shift the stories from notebook to stage. As opening night approached, students who did not write material for the show stepped into the roles of student director, stage manager, graphic artist, and camera crew.





In one lively rehearsal discussion, someone mentioned the fall of the Berlin Wall, an event that occurred well before these high school and middle school students were born. The image of a wall coming down, the group decided, was more powerful than the image of a wall going up. This idea took shape in the scene shop (Barry Hendrix's woodworking studio) as a replica of a section of the fence on the southern US border. Stark and slatted, 10 feet long and 7 feet tall, the fence rolled on stage at the start of the show. The lights cast the shadow of slats onto the desert backdrop, which loomed over every monologue, every poem, and every rap.

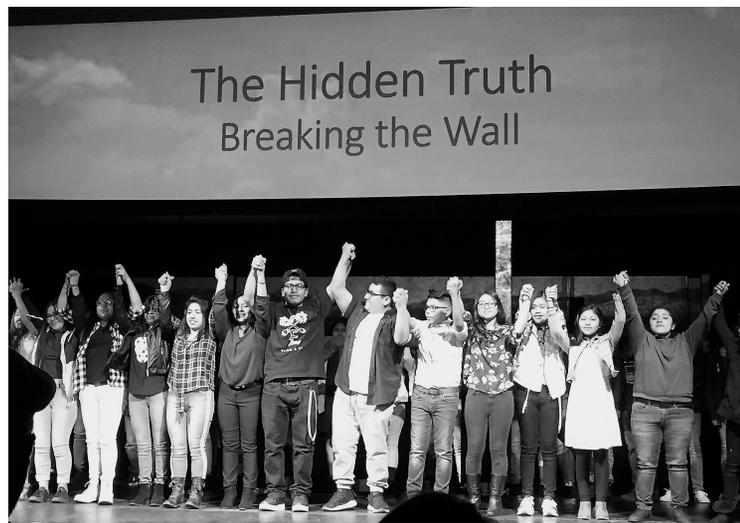
The fence became a rolling metaphor for the many barriers, both literal and figurative, that migrant students face. The threat of deportation. Broken families. Depression and anxiety. Too little money for too much work. Low expectations and unfair assumptions at school.



At the climax of the show, however, the fence was transformed into a symbol of overcoming as the performers dismantled it, line by line and slat by slat. In the words of Erik, a middle school student, “And the barriers that have been in front of us, we will take them down with our voices.”

And they did.

Now that the curtain has come down on *The Hidden Truth: Breaking the Wall*, we know that these voices will continue to resonate in the hearts and minds of their audience, and now their readers, through the pages of the club's forthcoming anthology. Here's to more walls coming down—and more curtains going up.



Other News and Updates



An anthology of student writings by the Mount Vernon Migrant Leaders Club will be released in June 2019. Created in partnership with Underground Writing, the

book is comprised of nearly 200 pages of student writing, art, photography, and afterword material. The book's foreword is written by two-time U.S. Poet Laureate, Juan Felipe Herrera. There will be an official Book Launch celebration on Thursday, June 13, 2019, including student readings, books for sale, and a time for community conversations. Updates about the event will be provided on our website, social media, and via [*The Underground Writing Podcast*](#).

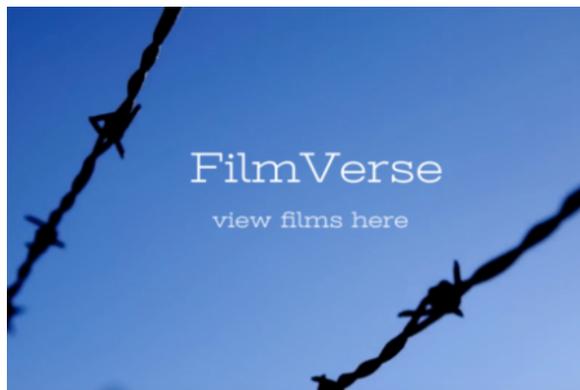


Underground Writing offers students unique collaborative opportunities. One of these opportunities is with Emancipated Stories (a project co-founded by Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright, Quiara Algría Hudes, who wrote the Foreword to our book, *What No One Ever Tells You*).

In recent months, we've been submitting our students' work to Emancipated Stories. Now you can see them as

well. [The writings have been published here.](#) There are 125 posts so far. About 20 or so of the last 25 are writings by Underground Writing students. There are also a few students published in earlier posts.

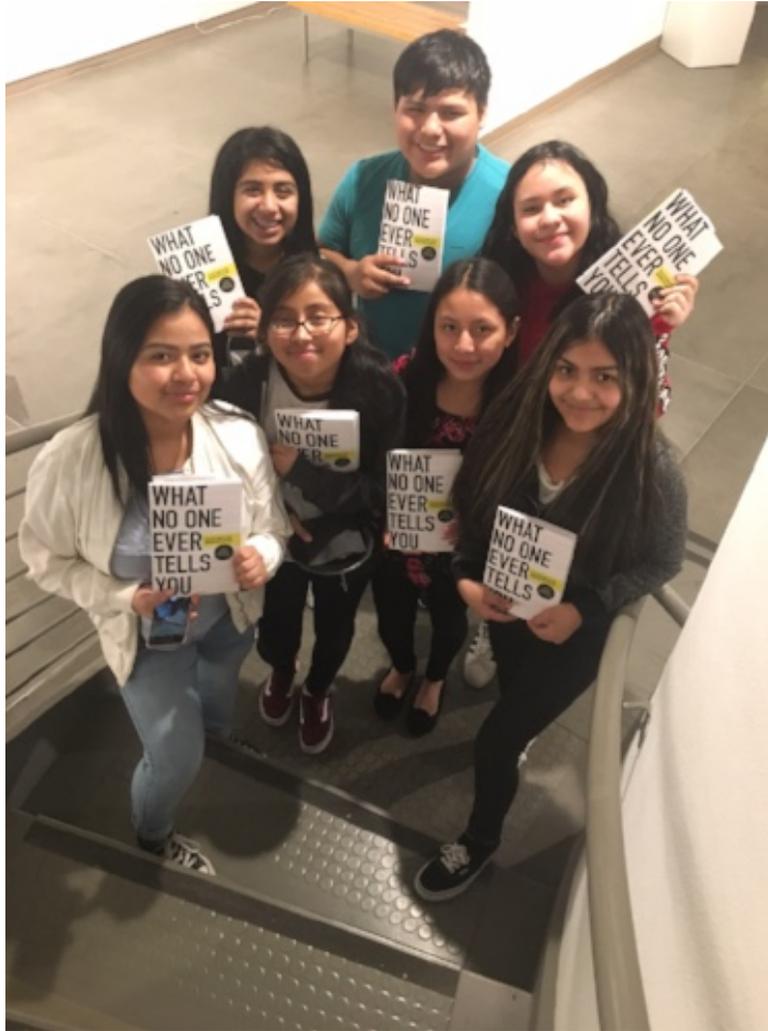
That's not all: our students who have been published via Emancipated Stories have each received a letter back from the project (see picture above)—a personal note, as well as a flyer that they can give to someone they know who might be interested in submitting work. Thanks, Quiara and the Emancipated Stories crew! A beautiful collaboration.



SAVE THE (New) DATE: Launched in 2018 by Underground Writing and Voices of the Children, *FilmVerse* is an annual collaborative project that uses writings from Skagit County Juvenile Detention as the inspiration for short films directed by Mount Vernon High School students. Our 2019 collaboration is underway at this time.

The films will be screened **Thursday, May 23, 2019, 6:30 p.m.** at the historic Lincoln Theatre in Mount

Vernon, Washington (and will be available for viewing on our website thereafter.) Last year's films can be seen here: [FilmVerse 2018](#).



[Students from our Migrant Leaders Club site]

Underground Writing is a literature-based creative writing program serving migrant, incarcerated, recovery, and other at-risk communities in northern Washington through literacy and personal transformation. Underground Writing facilitates generative readings of literature spanning the tradition—from ancient texts to those written in our workshops. Honoring the transforming power of the word, we believe that attentive reading leads to attentive writing, and that attentive writing has the power to assist in the restoration of communities, the imagination, and individual lives.

Our newsletter is published every other month, along with special editions and updates throughout the year. For 2019, we'll be sharing stories/essays written by our faculty of Teaching Writers, featuring our various workshop sites in Skagit Valley, Washington.

Underground Writing sites:

Skagit County Juvenile Detention (Youth)

Migrant Leaders Club

(Youth - Mount Vernon School District)

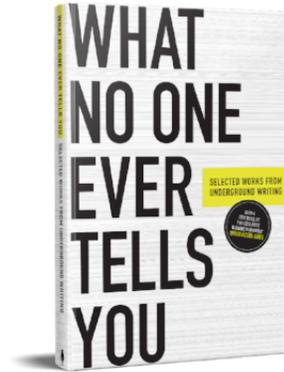
Skagit Valley Recovery Community (Adults)

YMCA Oasis Daylight Center (Youth)

Skagit County Community Justice Center (Adults)

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