

Welcome to Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop's November Virtual Write Night!
Thank you for taking the time to read and respond to pieces from incarcerated poets. To respond to the poems, please use the comment option by clicking anywhere on the poem, then go to "Insert" at the top left of your screen, and click "Comment." A box will appear in which you can type your comments. We will transfer your comments to the poems before returning them to the author.

General tips for leaving feedback: Start your comment like a letter, addressing the author by their name and ending the comment with your first name or initials. This isn't a grammar class focusing on what the author could have done better, but rather the opportunity to hear and engage with the voices of poets impacted directly by mass incarceration. Responses should focus on the emotions and messages the poet is conveying with you. Is there a line or image that really stuck out to you? Did something about the poem bring back a memory or do you have a similar experience with what is being shared? Let the poet know!

If you experience any challenges or have questions, please call us at 309-533-0395.

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I Don't Belong in Jail

By Rarkease B.

In my community, do I belong
Or do I not belong?
My soul doesn't belong in this environment
I was taught to be this way
I belong in college or in trade school being an entrepreneur
I deserve a better life
I should be traveling the world
Not sittin' in jail
I belong at home with my family
Enjoying life and experiencing obstacles
I belong in the NFL
I belong on top of the world being successful
The fight isn't over
But I have a long way to go
Moral of the story: I don't belong in jail

Singing Pesos

By Arnolfo J.

Mexican pesos sing in my pocket.

They sing popular mariachi songs.

It sounds like a joyful fiesta in my pocket.

Despite being many, they don't make jingling sounds.

When I extract a peso out of my pocket

They radiate so bright.

I take my pants off and leave

them in the drawer

I can hear them having a pleasant time all night without hindering.

Spanish is their primary language

but they randomly blurt out the catch phrase

"Easy money".

One day I was with my girlfriend, and they were singing out loud.

I was embarrassed but my girl thought it was a romantic serenade.

With all the bluster that happens in my cramped pockets

I catch people's attention.

Yesterday, I went to an Italian eatery and drew out American dollars to pay.

The characters on the bills had jubilant faces

with extensive sombreros on their heads.

The Shape of Freedom

By Khalid C.

Freedom to me, man that's a lot to explain
Like free from debt, stress and pain
Would be like dancing in the rain
First step is getting out of jail
This hell where my original plan failed
Financial freedom is the next step
Traveling from one place to the next
When I'm free, I'm hardly alone
I'm home with friends
I'm where I belong

Running Up That Hill

By Jaylen S.

Not belonging in jail
It's time for me to prevail
Hard to sleep in a cell
Should've just went to Yale
I'mma just keep it real
Fighting the government's a steep hill
But I'm gonna get up it
That's the end deal

Alone in a Crowd

By Christian R.

At times I'm surrounded by a lot of individuals
When they speak, eat, or do things
I feel more lonely every time
I never fit in anywhere with anyone
I don't think like everyone
I don't act like everyone
I don't speak like everyone
I have come to accept the fact that I'll be alone
When I lose
When I win
When I die
No matter how many people speak to me
I will be the only one who is fine
With being by themselves

How Do I Begin!?

By Brian G.

With ease I'll start this
journey of revealing my heart.
Clear thoughts poured out,
How do I begin?
With ease I've started,
Now where do I go?
Til the end you should know,
scribbling words of
purpose on this page,
as if jotting down notes.
Please let me lead your
mind through imagery as you read.
Just a form of
meditation mesmerized,
I pray you are as I am, full of ease.
Now let me end this poem,
How do I begin?
Praying you enjoyed as I did,
looking forward to the next few lines
in the future,
I'll write again

What They Can't Lock Up

By Delonté B.

The key is in my pocket
Tied securely around my neck
Not a noose, but obtuse
An angle too wide
To comprehend
My mother gave it to me
It still works at her front door
It still works at the store
At the polls at the core
It holds a few books
A few stories, a few proverbs
A couple situations, interpretations and inclinations
It's a chord, it's a verse
It's pros, it's cons
It opens a beautiful, complex box
The answers to why I snore

Creciendo

Por Jhon F.D.

Hoy como un día corriente

Son las 7 de la mañana

Listo a inicio de clases y con el corazón estremecido por que por fin voy a volver a ver a la niña que me gusta

Sentirla cerca, hablarle, mirarla y tal vez sentarme a lado de su sillón

Todo me motiva de ello menos iniciar clases

Eso es lo de menos

Quiero verte

Growing up

By Jhon F.D.

Today like an ordinary day

It's 7 a.m.

Ready to start class and with my heart shuddering because I finally get to see the girl I like again

Feel her near, talk to her, look at her, and maybe sit next to her desk

Everything about it motivates me except starting class

That is the least of it

I want to see you

Free, Where I Belong

By Ryan H.

I don't belong in jail
I get tired of the same thing all day, every day
Everything is the same
Same food
Same four walls
Same damned people
Tired of seeing everything in here
I belong on Planet Rock
I belong in the fresh air
I belong free!

The Little Boy Who Cried Change

By Robert L.

1st time I went to prison, I said I changed, and they believed me.

The love and trust is why they stayed with me.

2nd time I went to prison, I said I changed and it was iffy

The love and trust is why they ain't leave me.

3rd time I went to prison I said I would change, nobody would listen.

I thought it would help if I found a religion.

So, I read the Quran with The Muslims and the Bible with the Christians.

And the one I thought I would marry went missing.

The 4th time I went to prison I said I would change and they knew it was a lie.

I could hear the tears dropping from their eyes.

They would say can you come home and try?

The 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th times I went to prison I went through Hell.

And when I came home, I could not warn away the smell.

The 10th time I went to prison I changed and I was surprised.

When I told them they rolled their eyes.

I had goals and a plan.

All I needed was a chance.

But nobody gave me a hand.

When I finally changed nobody gave a damn.

I Can See Clearly Now

By Angelo D.

I can see clearly now the mistakes
that I have made in the past,

When the young mind has no sense of direction,
it's hard to see a clear path,

I can see clearly now how a young immature
mind could regret things later in life,

Because a mind with no understanding
and no moral compass to guide it, will always
go in the wrong direction in life

I can see clearly now how a young man
can take another person's life

How can it think morally when it can barely read or write?

I can see clearly now the pathway to glory.
When the young mind matures, it's able to reflect on its past stories,

I can see clearly now the pathway to redemption
When you have taken accountability for your mistakes
and you have asked God for forgiveness.

I can see clearly now the pathway to a new life story.
when you help save live lives now, instead of destroying them,

I can see clearly now the right direction in life.

When you follow in God's purpose
He will always lead you right.

Born a Mystery

By Cahlyl R.

I say I was born a mystery
As I never knew my history
Black culture sounded like a myth to me
'Cause it wasn't the best fit for me
I tried to walk the narrow path
And avoid the death penalty
I'm trying my best to stain the world
So that they will remember me
I wanna make my Momma proud
To the best of my ability
I'm waiting to see the next way
That the world tries to hinder me
Defying odds and praying to God
Has always been my proclivity
Despite being born a mystery
The Lord has a lot in store for me
Although I was born a mystery
My success will be clear to thee

Mommy

By Jasmin L.G.

When I think of taking care
In this moment in life, I think of taking care of myself
This means investing in myself
Learning, growing, pushing past my comfort zone and healing
This looks beautiful, like falling in love with yourself
Learning things about yourself and changing
Exceeding your limits and powerful potential
My mom takes care of me
When my mom comes through in ways where I need her
I feel protected and loved
When I think of her, I hear her singing in the morning
I feel her warmth, taste the tortillas she faithfully makes every day
Smell of the corn flour heating up
With the slight burning smell that I love so much
Meaning the tortillas are crispy
Looks like my mom smiling
Watching us enjoy her food
While she wipes sweat off her beautiful face
I gotta do better for her

The Letters

By Haile Z.

The first letters all said “no”
The first two didn’t discourage me a lot
But as the rejections kept coming
I felt like it was no longer possible
To consider anything but the cost
When picking a college
The first week of April, another letter came
The first word was *Congratulations!*
I didn’t believe it at first
I kept reading it, four or five times
The first scholarship I had received
The amount was small
But it made me realize scholarships were possible
Back in Ethiopia
There is no such thing as scholarships to go to school
Over the next few weeks, four more letters came
They all started with that golden word: *Congratulations!*
Each scholarship was bigger than the last
Way bigger!
I had been thinking about going to UDC
It was affordable and close by
But now, I could make a different choice
I could go to Catholic University on a full ride

I'm That One

By Wendell S.

I just done 32 years in jail
But I was free for most of that time
Because my mind is free
To live and love this thing called life
So free at last
Thank God Almighty
I'm free at last!

Red Chips

Jasper S.

I'm in my cell eating red chips, my brother just died,
and when I saw the red residue, it had me thinking
Did he die for the things I did?
Earth wanted its blood rights, an eye for an eye,
A life for a life,
I guess since my right-hand man wasn't blood related it didn't count.
I finally cried,
Those tears let loose the dam of a life less numb
that I was feeling inside.
My brother died, and now I'm alive.
My brother died as I was just starting to get back my life.
My brother died, and I'm hurting inside.
I can feel the pain as clearly as I can see the sky.
If I had food in my stomach when my mother told me,
I think I would have thrown up.
She held it together, so I did my part and kept my head up.
When he tears started to fall, I said "Alhamdulillah",
My body began to shake, and I didn't let them all out.
I wanted to, but someone turned the faucet off.
I just keep thinking about the red chili residue from the red chips,
reminding me of the things I did.
I know God punishes us and tests us to purify us from the life we live.
I feel like my blessing is going to come from the pain I feel.
A man won't bear the burden of another, but
when Ryan died, I lost my brother.
"Alhamdulillah," I say it despite it all.

The Lights Is Always On

By Ronald H.

No matter where I'm at, or what I'm doing
My lights is always on
In my cell, being the closest thing to hell
My light is always on
When I wake up, I pray to start my day
My lights is always on
They can take my shine, but they can't f*** with my mind
Because the lights is always on
At my darkest moments, when I'm my own worst opponent
My lights is always on
When I read the Quran, it's the generator of my electricity
As long as I stay close to Allah, can't none of this s*** get to me
Losing my wife and kids, because of the s*** I did
My lights is still on

Creciendo

Por Romeo R.

No fui a la escuela de niño
Solo trabajaba, pero era muy feliz
Jugando futbol los días domingo
Después estudiaba ya casado con mi esposa
Y hoy me pase un día muy feliz en la clase de mentes sanas

Growing up

By Romeo R.

I did not go to school as a kid
I only worked but I was very happy
Playing soccer on Sundays
Later, I studied once I was married to my wife
And today I spent a day very happy with Free Minds

I Belong

By Stevenson A.

I belong through right and wrong
I belong though I led myself the wrong way
I right my wrongs
And tell myself I belong
My family and I shall stay strong
Through right and wrong
I belong...

The Day Everything Changed

By Devyn B.

The day I got locked up for something serious
And I realized that I had to talk to my parents over the phone
Instead of actually seeing them everyday.
That hurt me so much and it's really eating me up alive
Because I barely get to see them.
They don't visit me as much.
This time away from my family made me realize
How much I actually need them in my life
Because this is the first time that I am actually on my own.