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## **I Said Poetry**

Sara deBeer

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# I Said Poetry

By Sara deBeer

My students, living on the streets  
By the seat of their pants,  
Perhaps the only pants they own,  
Had read Kafka's "Metamorphosis."  
My mentor told me they identified with Gregor.  
Like that human-sized cockroach,  
My students' presence triggers revulsion.  
Strangers despise them;  
Kafka understands them.  
I understood I had misread  
These students' capacity for understanding.

So I said, "Poetry"  
But they reacted as if the handout  
Were written in some Martian tongue,  
As if a poem were a cockroach.

In spite of these protests  
I launched into "Choose"  
Which I'd chosen  
Because Carl Sandburg is my "go-to" poet  
For people who resist going to poetry.  
His conversational tone  
Beckons each reader to come close.  
No word-wrestling,  
Just idea-engaging.

Our discussion ranged further and wider  
Than my narrow reading of his four-line poem.  
My students expanded my understanding  
Of the multiple meanings  
Of faith, trust, survival.

We read poems, we wrote poems, we shared poems.  
The last class, a young mother from Nigeria  
Told me, shyly, proudly,  
That she planned to buy a journal  
To continue her new-found pleasure in writing.

Months later, I saw her and asked,  
“Did you ever get a journal?”  
“Oh yes! One for myself;  
One for my son.  
We write together every night.”

I said, “Poetry.”  
I meant, “Learn from me.”  
I discovered worlds upon worlds  
Inside each poem,  
Inside each student,  
Inside myself.

**Author’s Note:** This poem is based on the author’s experience of teaching mini-courses for Beat of the Street (BOTS) Center for Creative Learning. BOTS, based at the Charter Oak Cultural Center, Hartford, CT, has the goal of making real and lasting changes in the lives of those experiencing homelessness.

**Sara deBeer**, a former public school teacher, is a published poet and professional storyteller, who offers workshops on a variety of subjects for participants of all ages. More information is available at her website: [www.storydebeer.com](http://www.storydebeer.com). Her work has been published in previous editions of the *New Jersey English Journal*.



**“Leaves” by Kendal Shirvan**, a senior at Northern Highlands Regional High School. Her full bio can be found with her other drawing “Sunflower Finger.”