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First Period

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First Period

AJ, in Sponge Bob slippers
and gold star-shaped glasses,
philosophizes with boyish certainty
on the futility of life.
It is school spirit day,
I have assigned Virginia Woolf.

The moth cannot escape -
We cannot escape.
Nihilism!
Existentialism!
Abe, blue-haired and glittery, insists.

Like me, I suspect,
Some of the others are worried,
wondering if we
will analyze this struggle to survive
for another thirty minutes
or years
without stopping.

Maura waves nail-bitten fingers:
She has read the introduction,
reveals the writer's watery end.
This is important, she says.

We are silent.
A beaded lacrosse player
pulls at the edge of her skirt.

Outside,
a cardinal brushes across
an evergreen;
a white birch falls.

Inside,
we dance.

Anne Wessel Dwyer teaches AP Language and Composition and American Literature at Madison High School. She is completing her twenty-eighth year as an English teacher.