

# The broken



A pregnant Michelangelo  
Emily Dickinson, that old bag?  
Thou shalt not curtsy to shame  
Oh, ambulance of my eye!  
Your place in the Fibonacci sequence

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Today's lesson relates to science standard six-dash-one-dash-fifteen: Students will understand how to skin a rabbit. As you can see, I've posted our essential questions on the board.

1. Which end of the rabbit do I start from?
2. Do I remove the entrails before or after removing the skin?
3. How do I treat the pelt?

Here on the table I've got our demonstration rabbit... Now, who has a guess as to which is the business end of the rabbit in terms of the de-skinning process? Anyone? Let's have a show of hands. How many say the tail end? The head? I'm just going to give you this one people. It's the tail. We start with hind end.

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## Breakfast Clubbed

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Why do I not see pencils moving?

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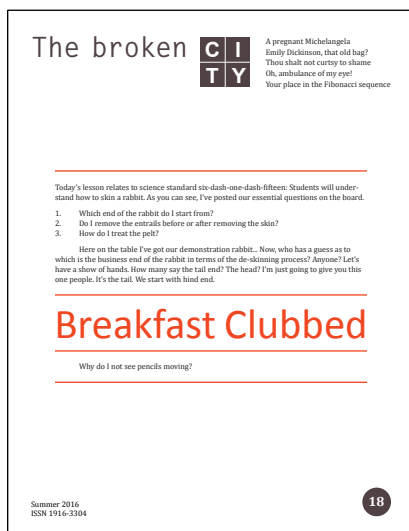
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Pencils down!  
Papers over! Eyes  
forward!

Welcome to *The Broken City's* school-themed edition.

They say you never really leave high school, and clearly the minds of several of our contributors are still lingering there.

Open your magazines and follow along, as we visit homeroom, the cafeteria, French class and the playground.

## Cover Text

The cover passage is taken from Heidi Espenscheid Nibbelink's short story, "How to Skin a Rabbit," which appears on page 10.

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*The Broken City* is currently accepting submissions for its winter 2016 edition: **Life of the Party**.

We're looking for work that revolves around parties and celebrations, from the sophisticated to the debauchorous: soirées, shindigs, galas, cotillion balls, beer busts at The Moontower—if someone's raising a glass, we want to know about it.

Send your poetry, fiction, essays, illustrations and photography to [thebrokencitymag@yahoo.com](mailto:thebrokencitymag@yahoo.com).

Deadline is: November 1, 2016. Submitters will be contacted after that date, with news of acceptance or rejection.

## Room 308

### *Louella Bryant*

*Louella Bryant is the author of Full Bloom Stories, two historical novels for young adults, and While In Darkness There Is Light, a Vietnam era account. Her award winning stories, poems, and essays have appeared in magazines and anthologies. Louella taught high school English in rural Vermont and writing in Spalding University's MFA program. She and her husband now run Fern Forest Treehouse B&B in Lincoln, Vermont. Visit her website at [louellabryant.com](http://louellabryant.com).*

Where did you get your teaching certificate, from a slot machine?  
If you knew how to teach, maybe I'd get a better grade.  
What do you mean you didn't grade my paper?  
What were you doing all night?  
Are you pregnant or just putting on weight?

I heard you were drunk when you chaperoned the dance—  
nobody your age dances like that sober.  
How old are you, anyway?  
My mother had you for a teacher.  
She didn't like you either.

Would you buy a pizza for the softball team?  
Would you buy a candy bar for the Costa Rica trip?  
Would you buy some cookies for Project Graduation?  
Can you write me a recommendation?

Read this—it's really good.  
You want me to rewrite it? What's wrong with it?  
Imagery? What's imagery?  
Emily Dickinson, that old bag?  
I heard she had a problem—all those drunken bees and vats of alcohol.

What do you mean I can't use that word in my paper?  
You're stifling my voice.  
Walt Whitman liked the smell of armpits? Gross.  
Do you like my belly button ring?

Homework? My computer broke.  
I broke my arm.  
My boyfriend and I broke up.  
My folks are broke.

I wrote this poem—what do you think?  
That part about the Goth with the tongue ring? That's not me.  
That part about hating the world? That's not me.  
That part about wanting to kill herself? That's not me.

That part about the mermaid with the lily-white skin? That's me.  
That part about the sacred song of sweet expectation? That's me.  
That part about the wood-spirit thumping its head against the hard marrow?  
That's me.  
That part about burning like a star in the heartless depths of space?  
That's me, too.

You like it? You really do?  
You want to read some more?  
You know, you're not so bad, for a teacher.  
Maybe I'll get you next year.

# Calibration

## *Quinn Gilman-Forlini*

I always loved dresses, but I was not always sure about being a girl. Sometimes, playing with my kindergarten friends, I was Jennifer,

sometimes I was Mark. Jennifer was mostly in the pretend kitchen by the stove burners. Mark was an artist, painted neon fish.

He kept fish, too, with bulging eyes in a glass bowl, and studied their scales under a microscope. That was biology.

\*

I drew in crayon with a boy named Ray. He said when he grew up he would be in the army. He drew tanks and bombs, so I drew tanks and bombs. He drew men with circle bodies, so I drew men with circle bodies, except I added skirts, scalloped edges.

\*

I wore dresses so often I thought “to get dressed” meant “to put on a dress.”

One morning my mother picked out jeans and a cobalt sweatshirt.

“I want to get dressed,” I said.  
“You are dressed,” she said.  
“No, *dressed.*”

She sent me to school. I writhed on the green carpet as Mrs. Lolly led us through the alphabet, then counting to twenty. I leaned toward my neighbor.

“I don’t know why I’m wearing these pants today. I wanted to wear—”

Mrs. Lolly had snuck behind me. She stuck her finger into my shoulder blade like a wasp sting.  
“No talking.”

I burned so hot I felt steam hiss off my skin. I couldn’t remember what came after eleven.

I would never break a rule again, I decided.  
I would be quiet.

\*

Although I had questions,  
    (Why do I cry when you cry?  
    What does it feel like to give birth?)  
I did not know  
what “to question” meant.  
Whenever anyone said the word  
I imagined a building like the Taj Mahal,  
and flying overhead, a bird.

# Ode to the Liberal Arts Math Requirement

## *Quinn Gilman-Forlini*

The morning of my midterm was maybe  
the happiest time of my life—the asphalt  
slick with freezing rain, everyone crouched

under everyone else’s umbrellas, three girls to one,  
everyone surprised at how slippery the normally  
mundane paths were, people squealing

at their new acceleration, even one girl who fell  
over and over on the same spot each time  
she tried to get up, her friend reaching out

a useless hand, her face sliding the spectrum  
of emotion, unsure of how to react, like when  
you can’t tell if someone is laughing or crying.

And I knew they would be going inside  
the warm dining hall for coffee and bagels  
and to wipe their smudged eyeliner clean

in the bathroom mirror, but I had to hurry past  
to take my math test, and I loved taking that  
math test, arriving in drenched rubber boots,

arranging my clinical island desk with my lime  
green pencil and the plastic calculator from  
seventh grade, when I’d made these pen

drawings around the buttons because I was bored  
with abstractions. Now in this basement classroom,  
I loved connecting the lines of a regular polygon

into a dodecagon star, then calculating the distance  
from one five-inch fence post to another along  
the line toward the vanishing point, a simple

proportion, how clarifying. I loved writing  
my name in the blank line at the top  
of the Xeroxed sheet of computer paper,

my small mark on the world, claiming my place  
in the Fibonacci sequence. I finished early,  
just after you, and you were waiting

in the hall for me like this was high school.  
We walked through the wet February day  
to eat corn chili smelling of cumin and rain,

but we hadn’t even finished when you looked  
at me and our eyes widened and you said,  
*Do you want to leave?* I said *Yes*, and I loved

saying yes, because I knew you meant we  
were leaving together, as if we could know  
where we were going, traceable lines we’d walk,

and we had other places to be soon—we knew  
we were going to be late, and I loved being late,  
I loved whatever time I arrived.

---

*Quinn Gilman-Forlini is an MFA candidate at the University of Virginia, where she also teaches poetry and tutors in the Writing Center. She is currently working on a lyric series about the construction of time.*

# Janice Has Gone to Miami Leaving Me All Her Animals

## *Gail C. DiMaggio*

December dusk, I'd find her on the scaffold—  
a pregnant Michelangela—  
sketching a jungle fantasia

on the cafeteria wall—  
one animal for every day the Ark was at sea.  
I'd praise the iridescent peacock, the mouse

tucked in the juniper and she'd go on  
dabbing scales under the pickerel's fin.  
Tuesday a girl-mob called her *ho* and *cracker*,

knocked her food to the floor. Wednesday  
she added a tiny brontosaurus  
water lilies dripping from his mouth.

Her grandmother sat between us  
and wept: The Lord forgive you, Janice. Just  
like your mother. And I was silent.

I've kept her notebook, for the marmoset swinging  
from the logo. Now at dusk in the cafeteria, I refuse  
to cry over them: cheetah, koala and rat—thirty-

seven creatures afloat in her improbable sky,  
the last three sketched in near the door.  
Silverback gorilla.

Siamese fighting fish.  
Head and shoulders of an appaloosa,  
running hard.

---

*Gail C. DiMaggio watched her husband play jazz in a world where no artist ever gives up a day gig. She has refused to become discouraged. Her recently-completed manuscript, North Light, obsesses about the intersection between art and an ordinary life. It's out there somewhere trying to find a home. Her work has appeared most recently in Slipstream, Salamander, Blue Lyra Review, Adanna's Women and Art Anthology, Antiphon, and Allegro.*

# A Very Mackenzie Monday

## *Mackenzie Dwyer*

*“Les chiens me plaît.”*

Shedding routine, my French teacher  
answers this with a question:

*Why* do dogs please me?

I glance northwest then offer the rather  
lazy explanation this seems to warrant:

“Since I can form bonds with someone  
who can’t talk.” Folks,  
they don’t call me gifted for nothing

—the new meaning eluded me until  
his face was crossed with its second  
shade of red. I knew no words  
could convince the tittering kids  
I’d meant it

(“Right—I may not have a dog on hand  
too much these days, guys, but at least  
I can make out with my cat”)  
but you bet I looked that man  
straight in the eye,  
grin unchanged as I found myself  
more content than ever with  
this fuckingupness we call

individualism. I said it: I owned it.  
Even when thou must hike up thy dignity  
thou shalt not curtsy to shame.

Translation:

if someone ever sees me blushing  
I want them to check where I’m looking  
& douse that and me in ice water.

(Instead of writing *chiens* on the board,  
that precious man wrote *chains*.)

*Since Mackenzie Dwyer could read,  
she’s known a longing to make a mark  
on literature. But another landmark  
decision of hers was to drop out of a  
marksmanship Junior Olympics qualifying  
round to go earn her black belt and  
a concussion. Her work has garnered  
recognition from the Scholastic Art &  
Writing Awards, numerous shortlist  
mentions, and acceptances in Ink In  
Thirds, Picaroon Poetry, and Les Rêves  
des Notre Ours.*

# A is for Apple

## MK Sukach

Also for avarice and asshole,  
nouns that might have proved handy  
on the playground, or not, I don't think  
anyone has ever said, *oh, ambulance of my eye*,  
or he's got a pronounced *Adams algorithm*,  
besides, that's too hard to picture  
in a coloring book. A is for acerbic  
or acetylene, or worse, A is for art  
and abracadabra where animals are blue,  
the sky purple. Sure, I'm still remedial...  
A is for aphasic and anomia. So I write  
with a dictionary and cheat through (a) thesaurus  
because A is for ambiguous and amphigory.  
A is a grade and grade A is aleatory.  
With any luck no one will mark you a "B"  
then cart you off to an institution  
with all the other crack ups.  
Sometimes A is an H with its hands raised  
or spread out on the pavement like the notorious X.  
A for fully self-actualized, aardvark, and abacus.  
A for orchards of Red Delicious, arrow, adventure,  
and ambidextrous. A for the first finger  
the doctor uses to point out what's wrong with you.

---

*MK Sukach is the author of the chapbook, Something Impossible Happens (Big Wonderful Press, 2014). His poetry and reviews appear in a number of journals, including BlazeVox, Sharkpack Poetry Review, The Journal, Connotation Press, Spoon River Poetry Review, Construction Magazine, Yemassee, and others. Closer look: mksukach.com.*

# Eraser Shavings

## Katie Voravong

Flecks of grey scrunched  
With black and white cradle  
You in shade.

Spilling from your small hold, too many pieces  
To carry, and counting, I  
Lose track,

Forgetting

Of the stencils  
We traced on frigid bark.

It came back  
With fading grace,

I cursed,  
You smiled,

Shattering slivers from what I drew  
Out from mindless thoughts

Ebbing like your turned back.

---

*Katie Voravong likes to type up and hand write words in many patterns and forms, ranging from prose poetry to fancy fiction. She enjoys looking at pretty flowers and staring at starry skies. Katie is a fairly simple person—like everyone else, she makes mistakes. With her handy dandy eraser, she tries to salvage her errors, but she writes really hard, so there's always faint marks that just won't disappear.*



# Harmless

## Irene Westcott

This is what happens when Anne Frank is your patron saint. Your spirit guide. Your romantic hero. You find yourself sitting in sixth grade history class—behind Roman De Palma and his strawberry-scented hair gel—absorbed in the VHS version of Anne’s tragic life. You thrill to the adventure of it. The secrecy. The danger. You can almost feel the handsome boy brushing past you in the attic, raising goose bumps on your skin. Instinctively, you know that Peter Van Daan smells of strawberries.

At night, you dream of railroad tracks.

You begin checking out library books on the Holocaust. Novels for “young readers.” In these tidy stories, the horrors have been smoothed out and tucked away, as if they were little more than wrinkled bed sheets. The taut surfaces discourage questions. You accept at face value the plucky teenagers who protect their younger siblings. The narrow escapes from ruthless officers. The ships bound for America with conveniently empty berths.

You are not Jewish, but your father is. You have dark eyes, dark hair and a last name that would—in another time—have marked you as *Juden*. When your blonde, blue-eyed best friend comes to spend the night, you stay up until 2 a.m. whispering about what it would have been like. You imagine yourselves into narrow, foreign streets. Her, frightened but unmolested. You, a yellow patch on your sleeve with forces to struggle against. This is the more interesting prospect.

The books become sacred objects—the biographies of your other selves. You carry them everywhere. At dinner, while the rest of your family pushes spaghetti around on their plates, you shiver in the shadows of a Warsaw doorway, pursued by men in steel-toed boots.

*It’s getting a little out of hand, don’t you think? your father asks your mother behind the spine of your book. All this morbid stuff?*

*A phase, your mother tells him. Harmless.*

In the railroad dreams—that’s how you’ve come to think of them—it is always night. There are no lights, no other travelers, no station platform. Just you and a dark slash of

track, stretching like an open wound to the horizon. You strain to see where it’s headed, but are defeated by perspective.

First period is homeroom, and there are assigned seats. For you, this means sitting directly in front of Kris Skinner. Buzzed blonde hair. Combat boots. Taller than most of the boys. Even if you slide all the way forward so the desk bites into your belly, her long arms can still reach your hair.

Kris is new to your town, and rumors cling to her like the smell of old cigarettes. It’s known that she was expelled from her last school. For breaking someone’s nose. Or slashing the principal’s tires. Or keeping a knife in her locker. The details change, but her authority does not. She inspires submission.

Your classmates quickly divide into groups—those who want to befriend Kris and those who want to escape her notice. You, however, are an anomaly. You fear Kris, but can’t seem to hide from her. Something about you invites attention.

Your homeroom teacher is a short, heavy-browed man named Mr. Kappo. His subject is Industrial Arts, but everyone, including him, calls it “shop.” His classroom sits deep in the basement of the school, where the concrete block walls are painted a redundant gray. Around the room, menacing equipment lies in wait: wood lathes, grinding wheels, soldering irons. At the front the room, a pair of windowless steel-reinforced doors are meant to protect, to prevent unsupervised use. To you, though, they awaken a sense of being sealed in.

One morning, shortly after the first bell, the fire alarm goes off. It’s a drill, a 15-minute holiday, and your classmates are raucous and giddy. Mr. Kappo leads them wearily toward the hall, shouting amid the press of bodies to “please keep the noise down.” No one notices Kris, still lingering at the back of the room; no one sees her snatch the book from under your nose and pitch it into a corner.

It lands face down behind a machine for boring holes. You run to it, bend to reach it and are knocked to the tile floor. Lying there, windless, cheek prickling with sawdust, you look out across a sea of empty chairs. You feel the hand in your hair, the flash of pain at your scalp, and you realize that *this* is your destination. Where you were headed all along.

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*Irene Westcott is a Chicago-based writer of fiction and creative nonfiction. Her work has appeared in many literary magazines, including the Baltimore Review, Roanoke Review, The Literary Bohemian, The 2nd Hand and others. Visit her online at: [irenewestcott.wix.com/writer](http://irenewestcott.wix.com/writer).*

# How to Skin a Rabbit

## *Heidi Espenscheid Nibbelink*

OK, children, listen up.

I'm waiting...

First, I'd like to introduce our visitor, Big Mike. Some of you may know him as the brother of Little Mike who owns the live bait and four-wheeler repair shop, but today Big Mike is here representing the School Board. Who remembers what the School Board is? Anyone? Come on people, this is embarrassing. The. School. Board. Yes, Ethan? Yes, I know you learned this in third grade. No, I do not think you're babies and deserve to be asked baby questions. Yes, I do know you could be hunting right now instead of wasting your time... Ethan! The School Board please?

Yes, exactly, the School Board is a governing body made up of representatives elected by the community to oversee and supervise all affairs pertaining to the public education of youth. Excellent.

Well, children, today the School Board has sent Big Mike to ensure that we are implementing our content-area standards with fidelity. Big Mike will be observing our lesson to make sure we're hitting our marks (to extend your hunting reference, Ethan, heh, heh. That's a joke, people. It's okay to laugh).

Today's lesson relates to science standard six-dash-one-dash-fifteen: Students will understand how to skin a rabbit. As you can see, I've posted our essential questions on the board.

1. Which end of the rabbit do I start from?
2. Do I remove the entrails before or after removing the skin?
3. How do I treat the pelt?

Here on the table I've got our demonstration rabbit (thank you to

Brittany's step-daddy, Mr. Longwell, who set up a sting operation in his cabbage patch yesterday). Now, who has a guess as to which is the business end of the rabbit in terms of the de-skinning process? Anyone? Let's have a show of hands. How many say the tail end? The head? I'm just going to give you this one people. It's the tail. We start with hind end.

Why do I not see pencils moving? Yes, Ashlee, this is one of the things I want you to take down. This is science standard six-dash-one-dash-fifteen, subsection (a): "Students will learn how to use natural resources in their environment to sustain life activities." No, Mei-Li, I will not always tell you when you need to write something down. You should write down concepts that seem important. Yes, of course everything is important, but I don't expect you to copy down my lesson word-for-word; that would be silly, wouldn't it?

Eddie! Head off your desk please! Eyes up front. Remember, we have a guest today.

Let's show Big Mike what good learners we are.

Now, hold the rabbit by the hind legs, like so. Our first step is to break the skin so we can begin working the skin off the muscle. Choose one leg... no Ashlee, it doesn't matter if it's the right or the left leg. Dion, I don't care if your cousin Ernie says it's bad luck to start on the left side of a four-footed critter but good luck to start on the left side of a two-footed critter. Just pick a leg.

Next we're going to scrunch as much loose skin as we can up around the ankle. See how I'm scrunching?

Anyone want to have a go? Angela? No? A volunteer! Dion, come on up here. See how loose that skin is? Now give it a good scrunch and push all that loose stuff up towards the foot. Lovely. Now we're just going to give all that loose skin a good twist ... twist ... twist ... until it breaks, like this.

Could someone please drag Dion into the hall and call the school nurse? Thanks, Kevin.

Carrying on! Step two. Pencils, people! That's it. We're going to pull the skin down the leg. Just roll it down, turning it inside out as you go, just like removing a used... never mind.

Roll it down until you can't get it any farther. Then, repeat the process on the other leg. Scrunch, twist, break, roll. There.

Now that we've got the skin off as far as the rabbit's hips, so to speak, we're ready for step three. We're just going to continue to roll the skin away from the muscle, gently tugging, all the way up to the head. And I'll hold it up so you can see I've got all the skin removed. Yes, Danny, I agree it looks like "a nekked chicken with its head caught in a turtleneck sweater." Nice analogy.

Who can tell me which essential question we're on? Ashlee? No. We've covered number one. So which essential question comes next? No, Ethan, I do not think you're diaper babies in baby school. Yes, of course I know what order numbers come in. No, I don't... fine! Essential question two. Ashlee! Be writing!

Have we removed the entrails?

Have we removed the skin?

So, do we remove the entrails before or after removing the skin?

What are entrails? Good ques-

tion, Lewis. I shouldn't have assumed you all had the vocabulary. Who can define entrails for us? Go ahead, Brittany. All right, I guess "blood and guts and disgusting stuff" is essentially the right answer.

So, back to essential question two. Do we remove the entrails before or after removing the skin? After! And that's science standard six-dash-one-dash-sixteen: Students shall be able to correctly distinguish between usable meat and offal.

Step four—we take a sharp knife. Well, I take a sharp knife because it's against the weapons policy for students to have knives at school. I take a hunting knife and I begin to make a... oops, I forgot a step.

Well, this is embarrassing. For those of you taking notes, you'll have to make this step three-A. Except for Eddie, because he's sleeping again. Would someone please poke him? Kevin? Thanks. Good morning, Eddie. Glad to have you with us again. Okay, step three-A. I'm just going to take this large pair of scissors and quickly snip off the rabbit's feet and head. Snip, snip... S N I P.

Kevin? Could I trouble you to drag Eddie into the hall and fetch the

nurse again? You're a dear.

That's it for step three-A. Now we're back to where we left off: step four, essential question two, science standard six-dash-one-dash-fifteen. I take my sharp knife and insert it at the top of the belly, being sure to press through the ribcage, but not poke through the back. Keep cutting down until you reach the pelvis. Now, stick your fingers into the slit, like so, and pull open the belly. If you reach up near the top of your cut, you'll feel the windpipe that went up into the head. You'll want to pull that out and place it on the pile with the other entrails.

Oh dear. Mei-Li and Ashlee? Do you think between the two of you girls you can get Kevin into the hall and...? Thanks so much.

There! Now your rabbit is ready for butchering, for freezing, or for throwing into the stock pot for stew. And we're moving on to our final essential question. Who would like to read question three from the board for us? Anyone besides Ethan? Very well, Ethan, have a go.

Brittany, would you please read Essential Question three for us in English rather than Klingon? Thank you.

So—moving on to the pelt, which is our inside-out-fur-suit. It looks pretty crumpled up and pathetic now. But, with the right treatment, you'll have a lovely soft fur you can use to make a stuffed animal or a hat. The most important thing is to rinse with really cold water as soon as possible. You want to make sure you wash out all the blood so that it doesn't leave permanent dark spots on the leather. As you can see, the water is turning quite red.

Ah, there goes Brittany. Let's just leave her where she is—the bell's going to ring in a minute.

Any questions? No Ethan, you cannot "call dibs" on the rabbit feet. Why? Because when Principal McCartney heard we were doing this lesson today, he called dibs. Well you know how unlucky he's been lately; it's no secret. I've never seen anyone else lose all his hair in a month. No, I'm not changing my mind... you'll have to take that up with him.

And there's the bell. Everyone do their reading tonight for tomorrow's lesson! Chapter Six—Entrails and What to Do with Them.

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*Heidi Espenscheid Nibbelink's short fiction can be found online at Drunk Monkeys, Shark Reef, 1:1000, New Pop Lit, and the Nude Bruce Review. She is an MFA student at the Sewanee School of Letters. When she's not writing or working as a high school counselor, she plays music—you can follow her on Twitter @AnnoyedOboist or on her website: heidinibbelink.com. No actual rabbits were harmed in the writing of her story.*

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