

Backpack Blues  
Spoken Word Poems  
by  
Melody Dean Dimick

ACE JACKSON

You call me the knave of hearts  
But listen to my gossip  
Foul rumors spread like tumors.

## CORA SIMMONS

I hear your whispers,  
“Cracker, trailer trash, redneck,”  
so I put my head down  
as I look for a seat on the yellow bus.  
*This seat’s saved,*  
a girl’s glare says.  
Her backpack smacks on the seat.

Two words painted in red across our  
shining home shout, NO TRESPASSING.  
*Don’t bother us; we’re armed*  
our trailer screams, offends,  
and angers, setting me apart.

Down the narrow aisle,  
trying to squeeze into  
any spot, I hear “No trespassing,”  
from a bigmouth begging for a laugh,  
and the snicker of another.

I cringe,  
face warm and ketchup-red, and  
sneak a glance back at our  
silver-tin-can home with its chain-link fence.

As I slide into a seat near  
the other loner, I wonder, was  
my survivalist Dad ever normal?  
Did he come to this because  
of a gene we share, or as a result  
of what he saw in battle?

Later, in gym class,  
I stand on the sideline, shifting  
my weight from foot to foot  
and stare at my shoes.  
Red neck spreading like poison ivy,  
as wanted by team captains  
as an irritating rash. I pray  
not to be the last chosen, knowing  
to them I’m trailer trash—  
Too toxic to touch.

ACE JACKSON

Don't bet your bottom dollar.  
No one escapes from high school.  
Don't even bother trying.

NOAH NEWMAN

Siri talks back.  
Unlike the girl in calculus class,  
she answers my questions.

She reminds me when assignments are due.  
She places my phone calls.  
She tells me the weather so  
I know enough to wear a coat.

She doesn't care that I'm a computer geek.  
Thanks, Dad, for the personal assistant.  
She was the perfect gift.

Unfortunately, Mrs. Deyon has said,  
"Cell phones are not allowed in class,"  
so I've turned Siri off.

Reluctantly, I must admit.  
She's not the first girl  
I've turned off.

## LANGDON CROSS

I would like to say,  
Lunch Lady,  
I can tell you see past my front,  
in the same way I'm aware of  
the brown old-age spots  
through the gloves you wear.

You know I pretend to have  
a home-cooked meal  
waiting when I get home,  
but you can see hunger in my eyes.

You know I haven't eaten  
since this time yesterday,  
and you give me a larger slice of pizza  
and an extra brownie.

Others look at you as if you're  
part of the cafeteria,  
but to me  
you're a lifeline in a white apron  
wearing a hairnet  
and transparent gloves.

The only two words you hear  
from me are *Thank you*, but  
I'm sure you read the full  
meaning in my wary eyes.

ACE JACKSON

Father, the king of diamonds  
Until he drew twenty-two.  
Tore the Queen right through her heart.

MARISOL GARCIA

This is our letter to the world  
Thanks, Emily Dickinson, for  
giving Mrs. Deyon the idea to push  
us to write our Mountain Top High anthology.

We acknowledge Edgar Lee Masters  
whose *Spoon River Anthology*  
knocked our socks off, inspiring  
us to voice our truths. You'll

see there was no holding back in this  
showcase of our senior year—  
We've opened our backpacks  
for your inspection. Listen

as we share our world—  
a shimmering magical snow globe—  
if you will—a transparent ball—  
but, at times, a whiteout in a blizzard.



ROSS PARROTTE

After school football practice  
Off to work  
Tweeting  
Texting  
Wii  
Facebook  
Sexting  
Sorry, no time for homework.  
Let Marisol eat the brownie points.  
I say, "Like whatev."  
Maybe, tomorrow  
I'll hand it in late.

## LEAH JONES

I'm a foster child—a hopeless stray.

Like the cat in Sandburg's "Fog"  
I sit in solitude in the rowdy cafeteria  
head buried in a borrowed book.

All I want is to eat lunch  
without jeers about my fat body.  
I'm a foster child—a feral intruder.

Ross appears out of nowhere  
like a mid-month pimple,  
"Wanna be one of my faves?"  
he taunts. "You could sext me a picture  
of that great bod."

"What have I done to make  
you pick on me?" I could ask  
Mr. Football Quarterback,  
but I don't.

Somehow, he assumes  
I do not get his mocking tone,  
but I do. Mrs. Deyon taught us  
about sarcasm.

I get up, and I slink  
away to lick my wounds without  
finishing the soup, or the surplus  
pizza stuck to the faded lime-green tray.

I'm a foster child—a hopeless stray.  
But have no fear.  
I'll soon be on my way.  
Hurray, Hurray, Hurray!

MRS. DEYON

Parents, you shaped  
the clay molded on your potter's wheels—  
my students.

When students carried  
their blues to me, like a sculptor,  
I cut through protective layers  
opaque as onion skins.

Students didn't write subtle.  
Sincere words and insights  
flowed in hormone-driven rhythms.

Embellished lyrics exposed  
snippets of private lives.  
In the halls, gossip hummed  
unguarded truths.

Because I listened,  
my reluctant poets revealed  
secrets scratched on lined paper.

Experiences not bared to busy Mothers  
bled from cracked vessels onto pages  
shared with me, spilling  
perspectives singular as snowflakes.

One must handle teens carefully.  
Like fragile pottery  
they are formed, ready to be  
fired, but not yet hardened.