



LEFT: Trevor Daniel holds the poster of his poem. RIGHT TOP: Isaiah Hunt shows Trevor Daniel the poster of his poem, designed by Jessica Miller, a senior in Kent State's School of Visual Communication and Design. RIGHT BOTTOM: Students get down to business at one of the sessions in the eight-week summer poetry workshop held at Skeels-Mathews Community Center, Ravenna, Ohio.



## Passing on a Passion for Poetry

Eighth-grader Trevor Daniel wasn't expecting much out of the eight-week poetry writing workshop his mom signed him and his siblings up for this summer at Skeels-Mathews Community Center in Ravenna, Ohio. When it came to writing poems each week, "I just did them because I had to," he says. "Some poems I did were good and some I did were bad."

But he wasn't surprised when one of his poems was selected to appear on a poster designed by a Kent State student from the School of Visual Communication Design—the workshop teacher had repeatedly told him he was a good poet. "And that was clearly one of my good poems," Trevor says. "What inspired it was my mind. I just think about things when I'm writing; if I'm enjoying it, I just get really down deep into it."

What did surprise him is that all the students in the class, ages 4 to 14, enjoyed writing poems: "Even my

brothers and sisters because they don't seem like the type of kids who would enjoy doing that."

The teacher who helped unleash this creativity is Isaiah Hunt, one of the graduate teaching artists at Kent State's Wick Poetry Center. And he credits the welcoming atmosphere at the center. "The tremendous support from the Skeels-Mathews staff has made this journey possible," Hunt says. "Each workshop session, I always felt at home and a part of the community."

His summer residency was made possible by Sandy Halem, enrichment coordinator for Family & Community Services Inc., a large social service agency that operates more than 70 programs in northeastern Ohio, including at Skeels-Mathews Community Center. She facilitated the partnership with the Wick Poetry Center and helped raise money from the community to fund the residency.

"I consider Kent State to be the mother ship for bringing great programs to many of our services in Portage County," Halem says. "Isaiah helped these students understand what poetry was and—most importantly—that they could be poets. As the weeks progressed, they began to see poems not as a foreign language but as an opportunity to experience different words and to express feelings in a way that was not usually expected from them in their schools. And when they stood to read their poems to the class, Isaiah would coach them: 'Say it loud and proud!'"

"I knew Isaiah had won them over one day when he wasn't there. Since he had just taught how an ode in poetry can honor and illuminate feelings about someone, the students in the class wrote a poem together called 'Ode to Isaiah,' and they each expressed their feelings about how he was opening up their minds and hearts creatively."

A collection of the students' poems is published in a chapbook compiled and designed by the Wick Poetry Center. Students in the poetry workshop not only learned to write poems but also gained in self-esteem, says Sharon Sanders, who has been running the summer youth program at Skeels-Mathews for 20 years.

"Isaiah Hunt is a role model for our African American young males," she says. "When they are surrounded by so many negative influences on a daily basis, they need to know that this doesn't have to be their story. They can achieve anything if they can believe in themselves and work hard to achieve their goals. It is important for our children to learn good writing skills and how to express themselves through creative writing and poetry, while building pride in themselves and in their community."

Trevor understands that this experience may change him and his trajectory. "My mom told me it would," he says. "Because once I get to high school or when I go on to a good college, I can show them this and get into good places. And I don't just have to do poetry—but I will still keep doing it." ⚡

# I Want To Be

I want to be a Sun  
bright, shiny, and round  
I come for the day and  
leave for the night.  
I want to be the window  
you look out every day.  
I want to be the  
basketball that you  
use to win the game  
I want to be the glasses  
you wear so you can see  
your future is clear.  
I want to be the cup of water  
to give you a fresh new taste.  
I want to be the cake  
that you reward yourself  
after you win.  
I want to be your  
#1 fan when you win or lose.  
I want to be a spring  
to spring you on  
when you are at  
your lowest.

—By Trevor Daniel, 8<sup>th</sup> grade  
Skeels-Mathews Community Center  
Summer Camp, Ravenna, OH

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