

WRITE YOUR WAY

Voicing Individuality and Community



A Voices UnBroken Curriculum

The following pages will contain a sample of exercises from each section of the curriculum.

Voices UnBroken Mission Statement and Guiding Principles



Mission Statement

Voices UnBroken is a Bronx-based non-profit organization dedicated to providing under-heard members of the community - primarily youth, ages 14 - 21 - with the tools and opportunity for creative self-expression. Through high quality creative writing workshops in group homes, residential treatment facilities, jails, juvenile detention centers and various other transitional and alternative settings, Voices UnBroken nurtures the inherent need in all people to tell their stories and be heard. It is our belief that this telling of stories and sharing of dreams leads to individual and community growth.

Guiding Principles

- Voices UnBroken helps participants identify dreams and goals
- Voices UnBroken believes in and nurtures the creative voice in all people.
- In a Voices UnBroken workshop, everyone has something to teach and everyone has something to learn.
- Voices UnBroken is a non-judgmental organization. We value every person's right to self-identify and we do our best to work with people's judgments about the work we do and the people we serve. This non-judgmental stance has helped us to achieve and maintain organizational integrity
- Voices UnBroken is committed to evaluating and documenting our programs.
- Voices UnBroken identifies and fosters leadership.
- Voices UnBroken respects, values and cares for our participants.
- Voices UnBroken is accountable to our participants and to our community.
- Voices UnBroken expects Greatness!

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VOICES UNBROKEN CONTACT INFO:

www.voicesunbroken.org

www.myspace.com/voicesunbroken

www.facebook.com - Search for Voices UnBroken

Tel. 718. 292. 3018

Fax. 718. 292. 3025

Street Address:

370 E. 149th Street, 2nd Floor
Bronx, NY 10455

Mailing Address:

PO Box 342
Bronx, NY 10461

Contact Executive Director
Victoria Sammartino at
Victoria@voicesunbroken.org

Contact Program Director
Celeste Rivera at
Celeste@voicesunbroken.org

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"The Journey of a thousand miles
starts beneath your feet."

-Lao-Tzu



TOOLBOX

The Toolbox holds Voices UnBroken's collection of Warm-Ups, Check-In Questions, and Writing Prompts. It also includes one-page intros to some of the most common and useful poetic devices: haiku, personification, alliteration, sensory language, metaphor and simile, and acronym. We hope you will find these tools useful to get your writing going!

WRITING PROMPTS

I never thought...

I'm the kind of person who...

I'm scared...

All around me, I see...

In my past life I was...

I believe...

POETIC DEVICES

HAIKU

What is a haiku? Haikus are a traditional Japanese poetic form with three lines of five, seven, and five syllables.

You remember syllables, right? They are the beats in a word.

For example:

FRIEND = 1 SYLLABLE
 COUR/AGE = 2 SYLLABLES
 PO/ET/R Y = 3 SYLLABLES
 JAN/U/AR/Y = 4 SYLLABLES

Examples of Haikus:

Faded images
 of your face in the mirrors
 burn my memories
 -Connie

I know for a fact
 family loves me too much
 so I won't hurt them
 -Jeanette B

Name the traveler
 Been to so many places
 But I seen few things
 -Addiasha Q.

This girl's far from home
 Soon I will return to home
 Soon as I find it
 -Addiasha Q.

POETIC DEVICES

HAIKU

Your Turn:

line 1 (5 syllables) _____

line 2 (7 syllables) _____

line 3 (5 syllables) _____

line 1 (5 syllables) _____

line 2 (7 syllables) _____

line 3 (5 syllables) _____

line 1 (5 syllables) _____

line 2 (7 syllables) _____

line 3 (5 syllables) _____

line 1 (5 syllables) _____

line 2 (7 syllables) _____

line 3 (5 syllables) _____

line 1 (5 syllables) _____

line 2 (7 syllables) _____

line 3 (5 syllables) _____

POETIC DEVICES

PERSONIFICATION

What is Personification? Giving an inanimate object or abstract idea, the traits and qualities of a person or animal, such as emotions, desires, sensations, physical actions and speech.

Examples:

"The heat is angry
The bacon and eggs of summer are sweating
And the bullets are finding air conditioning"
-Theodore V.

"Violence
had on the blue pradas
or stilettos and jeans
and always seemed to follow me."
- Hope C.

Your Turn:

List 3 things you see in an apartment, 3 types of food, 3 objects you see on the streets and 3 articles of clothing. Then, give each thing a human emotion or actions.

Example (Things in an apartment): The TV was muttering softly to itself

_____ (object)

_____ (human emotion or action)

_____ (object)

_____ (human emotion or action)

_____ (object)

_____ (human emotion or action)

POETIC DEVICES

PERSONIFICATION

Your Turn Con't.:

Example (Types of food): Burnt chicken feels forgotten.

_____ (object)
 _____ (human emotion or action)

_____ (object)
 _____ (human emotion or action)

_____ (object)
 _____ (human emotion or action)

Example (Objects on the street): The car horn is screaming, "Move"!

_____ (object)
 _____ (human emotion or action)

_____ (object)
 _____ (human emotion or action)

_____ (object)
 _____ (human emotion or action)

Example (Articles of clothing): The pocket of my jeans was hugging a ten dollar bill.

_____ (object)
 _____ (human emotion or action)

_____ (object)
 _____ (human emotion or action)

_____ (object)
 _____ (human emotion or action)

"To be a person is to have a story to tell."
- Karen Blixen



SELF

This section is all about you. Your likes and dislikes, your dreams and fears. What you believe, what you've been through, and where you want to go. We know that sometimes we don't know ourselves as well as we think, and sometimes we don't get enough time to appreciate all the things about ourselves that make us unique. Writing is a place to do that.

KNOWING MY NAME

What does your name mean? How well does it describe you?

My Name

My name is the traveler. Ever since I found out this is what my name means, I made it my business to believe it and fulfill it. I've been many places in my short life time. Such as South Carolina, North Carolina, Texas, Virginia and Baltimore. I intend to go many more places. It doesn't end there. I have many continents to visit.

When I hear my name. I think of the island of Corsica, India and Egypt. All these places I want to go and haven't been. I need to go. I will go.

Whenever my name is mispronounced, I just remind them how to say it. It isn't a name that can just go by mispronounced. It must be spoken with courage and determination. It is my name. It is me. If you mispronounce my name, you misunderstand me.

- Addiasha Q

Guided Free Write

Take a few minutes to write without stopping in response to the following three prompts:

My name is....(Write about your name—what it means, where it comes from, how you feel about it—without actually using it)

When I hear my name...

Whenever my name is mispronounced...

KNOWING MY NAME

Using your free writes and inspiration from the piece above create your own poem or piece about your name.

Group Option: Ask everyone to underline 2 or 3 of their favorite phrases from their free write. Collect these phrases on a paper in a group poem

HOLDING HANDS

Take a look at the hands on the next page (or use a blank page to trace your own hands). Imagine that these hands are holding onto different parts of your life.

In one hand, write or draw all the choices, relationships, hopes, memories, and habits you want to hold onto.

You could include things that you have done that you are proud of, or things that you've learned. You can also write names or draw different people who you trust, or people who inspire you (they don't have to be people you met- it could be someone from history or someone you've heard stories about).

In the other hand, write or draw things, relationships, habits or thoughts that you are ready to let go of.

This hand is also a good place to put mistakes that you feel you don't want to keep carrying.

With my hands I am able to give a passionate touch.
 With my hands I can feel the world
 With my hands I will keep my future children secure

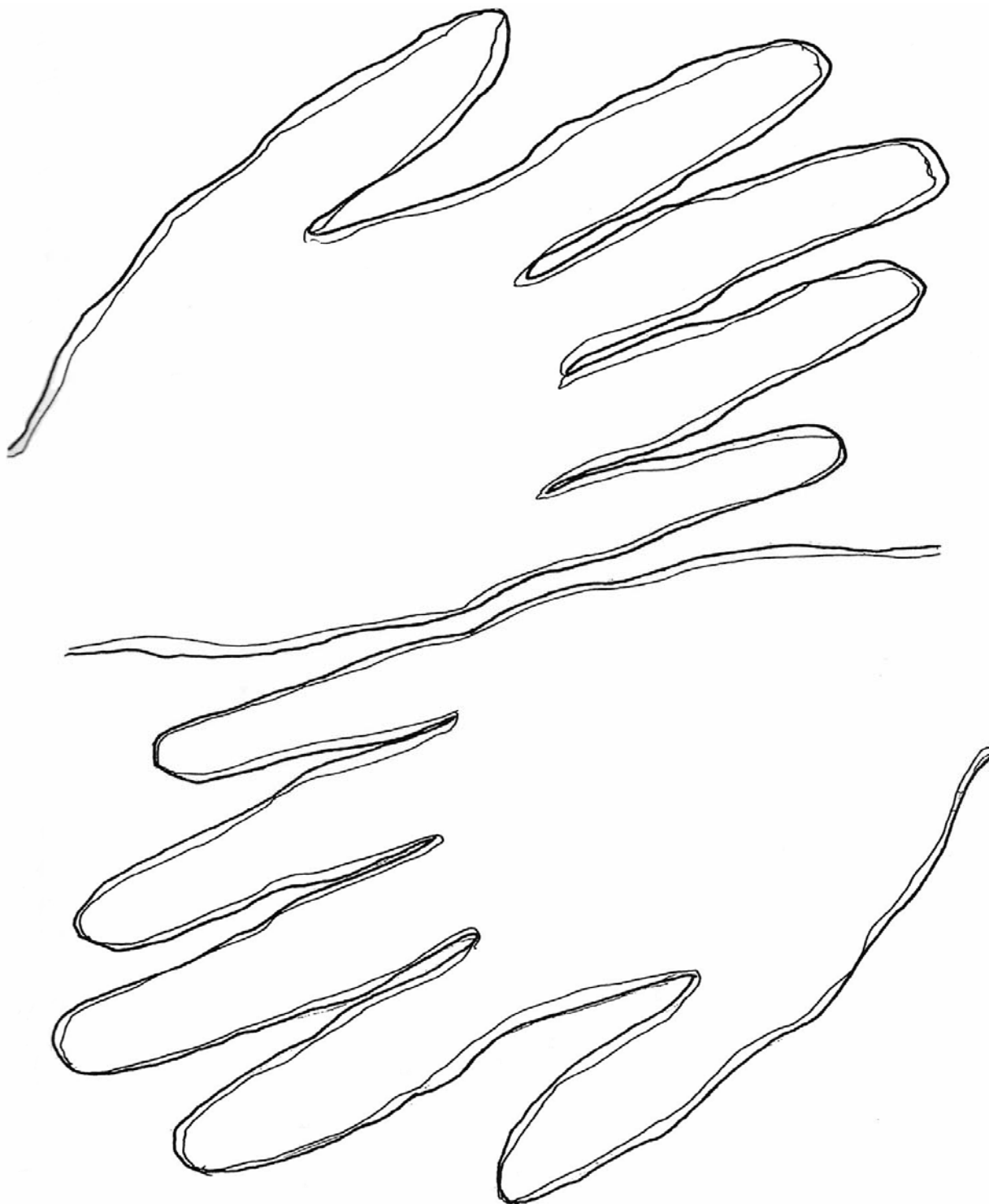
With my heart I can feel the love of god
 With my heart broken, I can still love
 With my heart I carry the emotions of my life

With my mind, there is nothing I can't do
 With my mind I can learn and teach
 With my mind I can be who I want to be

With my feet, I have walked through hell
 With my feet I have danced the dance of love
 With my feet I will not give up and
 keep on walking with the sky as my limit.

- Joan K.

HOLDING HANDS



HOLDING HANDS

Write a good-bye poem to one or more of the things you have in the "let go" hand.

- What do you want to say to those things before you let them go?
- How do these things feel in your hand?
- Are they heavy or light? What is their texture?
- What does your hand do with those things- does it flick them, does it fold them into a paper airplane and fly them away, does it push them?
- Where are you sending them when they leave your hand?
- What might you say to those things if they come back?
- How will your hands treat those things if they do try to come back? Will they want to reach for them? Will they make a fist?

HOLDING HANDS

Write a thank you poem to the things in the “hold-onto” hand.

- How will you get them to stay?
- What have they done or what do they do for you?
- What feelings do these things give you?
- Are they heavy or light? What is their texture?
- How do you hold onto them (tight, gently, etc.)?
- What might you say or do if they do try to leave you?

"I long, as does every human being,
to be at home wherever I find myself."
- Maya Angelou



COMMUNITY

We are all part of many communities. Communities are connected to places: the block we live on, the neighborhood, city or town, and countries we are part of. They are also connected to people: the people we hang with, work with, and go to school with. People we tell our secrets to, and people who share our heritage or culture. Keep an open mind as you explore the different communities you are part of in this section.

COMING FROM WHERE I'M FROM

Think of places that you know very well.

96th and Lex

Where I'm from is not
So quiet and not so loud.
Where I'm from is a small
Neighborhood where everybody
Knows everybody.

I am from a sweet lady
That would give me anything.
My mother. Her kitchen smells
Like fresh rice, beans and chicken.

I am from aN environment
Where a lot of teenagers are determined
To do good

Where I am from is
A non—anti social place
Where all you smell are cigars
And cigarettes being smoked.

Where I'm from is very hectic
On the subway, buses and cars
During rush hours

I am from uptown where
Everyone gets along and
Every corner you turn is a fruit stand
Smelling sweet.

I am from a family with two older sisters
Leading me in the right directions.

This is where I'm from.

- Samantha

Where I'm from

Tastes like...
Pizza from the chicken spot
BBQ spare rib tips from the Chinese food store
Collard greens cornbread
Baked mac and cheese.

Sounds like...
LOUD
Gunshots
Screaming
Honking
Glass breaking
Car alarms
Babies crying
Shower running
Music videos on tv
Knocking on the window
Doors slamming

Feels like...
Nasty though silky
Soft like a pillow

Smells like...
Pollution
BBQ's cooking
Smoke
Victoria's Secret
Lovespell
Mezmerize

Looks like...
Kids playing, making up games in the street
Homies playing dice
Nissans, Chryslers
Fights, girls arguing
Bodegas on the corner
Loosie spots
The Lord man

- Vanessa

COMING FROM WHERE I'M FROM

Try this exercise starting with a country, then a state, then a city, then a neighborhood, then a building, ending with a room. Can you do this with the room you're in now?

Examples:

- ❖ Chinatown smells like salty, crispy crackling roast duck.
- ❖ My grandmother's house feels like the unwelcoming stiff plastic she used to cover the couches.

_____ looks like _____
(A country)

_____ sounds like _____
(A state or region)

_____ tastes like _____
(A city, town or neighborhood)

_____ feels like _____
(A building)

_____ smells like _____
(A room)

COMING FROM WHERE I'M FROM

Write a poem about where you are from. Make sure to include sights, sounds, tastes, textures, and smells. You might use the poems on the next page for inspiration.

You might use one of these lines to start your poem:

I am from...

Where I'm from...

Coming from where I'm from...

COMMUNITY VALENTINE

Think of a place you love. It could be a home, a block, a city, or a country. Is there anywhere in that area that you think you might know better than almost anyone else. It could be a restaurant that serves your favorite dish, a corner where you spend time with your friends- just think of a place that has meaning for you.

I Want The Special

3pm - after school

Deja, Sade, Samantha, Meosha and I walk to the pizza shop

two doors down from the movie theater,

across the street from Macy's

the chef is opening and shutting the oven

and the sound of the pizza being adjusted makes every second I wait feel like forever

I can smell the cheese, the tomato sauce, the pizza dough and the garlic before I even get to the counter I place my order,

I want the special

I tell the tall man with low cut hair and a white, dough-covered apron

My friends and I find our regular booth behind the door

and talk about school and make plans for the weekend

ORDERS UP

We stop talking to get our food

Deja and Meosha get the pizza, sodas (and garlic knots, if we're lucky)

Samantha and I bring the garlic, grated parmesan cheese, oregano

and hot peppers to the table

I sprinkle cheese and garlic on my slice

and tear the crust off in pieces, dipping it into the pizza grease on my slice

between bites I take 3 sips of sprite and wipe my mouth with a little white napkin

4:00, 4:30, 4:45 ...

And we're still sitting in our red and tan booth

talking, eating and enjoying the special

-T

COMMUNITY VALENTINE

Brainstorm about that place.

- What's special to you about it?

- Do you have specific memories of being there?

- What do you see, smell, hear, eat, and touch in that place?

- What is unique about this place?

- You might not see it if you just pass by...

- When I am away from you, I miss...

- No matter where I go, I can't forget...

COMMUNITY VALENTINE

Write a valentine to your community.

Going Further: Imagine that someone outside of your experience read what you wrote (someone who hasn't spent much time in the place you describe or wasn't really a part of the same group of people as you). Do you think they would be surprised by anything you said?

"When spider webs unite
they can tie up a lion."
African Proverb



SELF IN COMMUNITY

Being a member of a community means being connected to others, it means being a part of a whole. Once we acknowledge the communities we are a part of, we inevitably start to think about the ways our thoughts, feelings and actions impact others in positive and negative ways. We also recognize the potential for making our communities better, healthier and safer by working on ourselves.

ROOTS

Imagine yourself as a tree. (You can use our drawing on page 69, or make your own.)

IN THE ROOTS, fill in the things that nourish you. Fill in the roots with names of people, places, groups, or activities that keep you down to earth, or that you feel are necessary.

I've Been Through It All

I've been through it all
 I've had my ups and downs
 but still I stand tall
 I've slept in places I never
 thought I would
 like a crack house, outside, and in the hood.
 My pride was so high that I
 wouldn't let it down
 I was just so afraid to say ma
 I need you right now
 I left her when she needed me the most
 When she begged and cried for me
 not to go.

I guess I wanted to be grown
 and not listen
 Now I'm stuck in treatment and
 I have to listen
 My frown is turned upside down
 when it should be glistening.

My life is hard, but I'm still here
 tryna stand tall
 cause "I've been through it all".

- Sakoya B.

ROOTS

IN THE TRUNK, think of things that give you strength. These could include qualities about yourself, things you are good at, things you have been through that make you strong today.

The Phoenix

The phoenix
in the darkness she flies
more like a black butterfly with Eloquence
Black is what surrounds her
the cold is what embraces her
hopes and aspirations no longer inspire her
things that she has accomplished now mean nothing to her
So when she hits the light she burns
the rays of love and beauty sting her
Never-the-less now it left her
with trials and tribulations, time and time again
not getting rid of the sorrow within
She burns into flames
as she sings a song of gloom and tears
She is reborn with the joy and song of might
just for it to run as dark as midnight
Once again stone is what your heart is made of
the flames in your eyes as you cry from the tear duct
the bird then lets out a solemn cry
then she notices how much she burns inside
she wishes she could explain why
she became this type of bird
whose flight is only begun at sunset
But burns during the Sunrise
as she rises from the ashes
her spirit becomes renewed
and all others can honestly say
is that we've always missed you

- Cassandra S.

ROOTS

IN THE BRANCHES, think of the things you want to grow towards. Are there places you want to go? Things you want to see? Work you want to do? A kind of person you want to be?

My life has been like a sour lemon.
Everything has been so messed and mixed up
they say when life gives you lemons
make lemonade but I don't have
a pitcher. I believe I'm putting my best
foot forward but someone always
comes along and trips me and the
other one comes first. I thank
God for my family that's always got my back.
When the clouds open up and rain on me
they are there with an umbrella.
Sometimes I believe the weight
of the world is on my shoulders like a 400 pound woman in
some heels. So many things are so wrong
but I also believe I'm blessed with a
loving family and a high school education
not too many girls can say that.
Growing up I was abused like Rodney King
but was loved by my grandmother
more than a gold-digger loves money
Basically it was s****y but my motto
is it could always be worse.

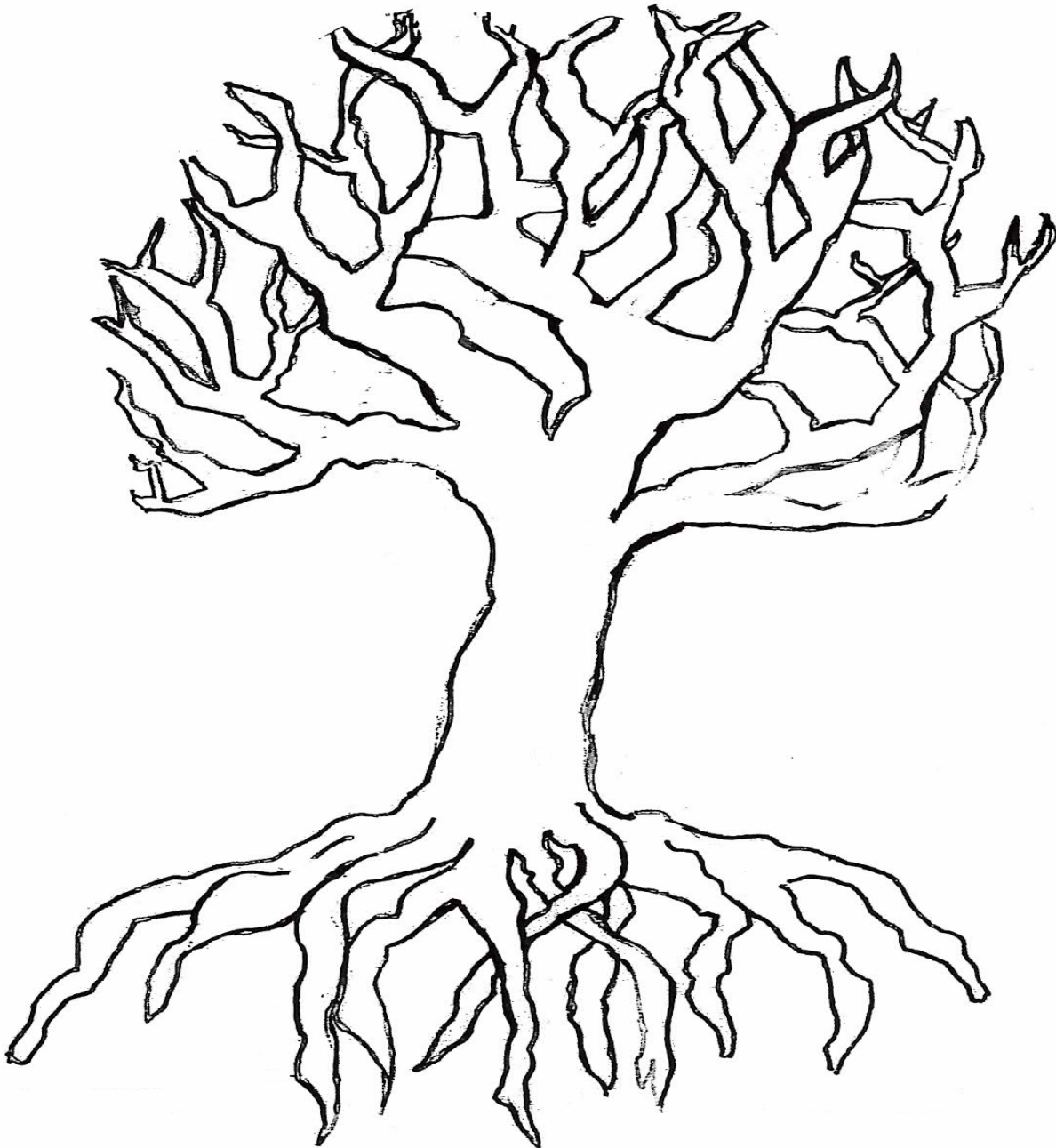
- Sonie W.

ROOTS

IN THE ROOTS, fill in the things that nourish you. Fill in the roots with names of people, places, groups, or activities that keep you down to earth, or that you feel are necessary.

IN THE TRUNK, think of things that give you strength. These could include qualities about yourself, things you are good at, things you have been through that make you strong today.

IN THE BRANCHES, think of the things you want to grow towards. Are there places you want to go? Things you want to see? Work you want to do? A kind of person you want to be?



ROOTS

Write a piece inspired by your tree. You could begin with the following lines:

- I am grounded by...
- I get my strength from...
- I grow towards...

SNAPSHOT

Think of a person you know well who is important to you. It might be a person who is in your life now, it might not be. It might be a person who doesn't know how much you appreciate them. A friend. A family member. It might be a person you admire, but you've never gotten close to.

Name of person	What you call them	Is there a place you connect them with? Describe that place.	When you picture this person, what is he or she wearing?	Is there a food that you connect to this person?	Describe his or her hands.	An expression he or she uses, something he or she says a lot.	A dream you had about him or her.	Name of a song that reminds you of him or her.	A gift you could give him or her, what would it be?	Something you wish you could say or would like to say to him or her.

SNAPSHOT

Here's some more room to finish the poem. Add any details that are missing to give the reader a real picture of the person you're writing about.