

SpeakOut! CLC

***Constance Davis, Grace Dotson, Mia Manfredi, Ainhoa Palacios,
and Tanya Sopkin, with Tobi Jacobi and Mary Ellen Sanger***

Reflection

Five interns at the Community Literacy Center at Colorado State University (Mia Manfredi, Constance Davis, Tanya Sopkin, Ainhoa Palacios, and Grace Dotson) collaborated in the creation of this piece (with guidance and a few words from the directors, Tobi Jacobi and Mary Ellen Sanger). Each of us has participated within a cluster of SpeakOut! writing workshops over the course of the fall 2022 semester, which take place at shelters for the unhoused, rehabilitation centers, and community correction/work release facilities. Each of our experiences is vastly different, though we noticed similar themes arising within our group discussions about the individual workshops. Elements of comfort, vulnerability, imagination, curiosity, diversity, and individualism are significant components within the program. SpeakOut! allows us to transcend our preconceived notions of creativity, reaching others with a collective voice from a heightened platform.

The piece began with a close look at lines compiled from free writing we did individually and then as a group, as we wrote and shared our experiences about facilitating SpeakOut! workshops. We turned segments of those responses into this poem. We began to write the final version with inspiration from Ocean Vuong's novel, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*. Within his book, the narrator alternates between sections of poetic lines that capture feelings and reflections, and then he braids those lines with narration of specific memories. Using a similar style, we combined the emotions that arose before, during, and after workshops with specific memories and recollections of the workshops.

Learn more about the CLC's work at <https://literacy.colostate.edu/> and the SpeakOut! Writing Workshops that inspired this piece at <https://speakoutclc.wordpress.com/>.

SpeakOut, lingering

1. *Uncertainty*

I'm nervous
 until I am not.
Am I the only one who feels this way?

A woman walks into the space

and grabs onto the door frame.
She says, “I’ve never written a poem,”
but enters, anyway.

I’m nervous
 at first.
Then elated when more start to join.

I’m nervous
 until each of us reaches for a pen.

We collectively begin to
enjoy each other’s company.

Sometimes I think I have to be on top of everything—but most of the time everything falls into place perfectly as it should be.

- *Write about trust in yourself.*

2. *I become vulnerable*

Writing spaces can be intimidating.
A place to confront the past and the future
by creating in the present.

The retelling of memories
through vulnerable work.

This process is aided by having a certain level of
softness.

Creating, sharing
 beautiful, raw emotions.

I am almost at a loss for words.

Sometimes writers read aloud. Many of their words come from a vulnerable space. They seem hesitant about the responses that may come.

However, after each participant shares with the group, writers engage in uplifting, supportive conversations with one another about their writing. Feelings of empathy and admiration spread throughout the room.

- *Write about a time you felt empowered.*

3. *Comfort*

I want them to feel comfortable to

express,

comfortable to share.

A space for wonder and exploration

maybe, wandering aimlessly–

For processing with others around us

For pushing through the weeds & roadblocks of the day

Moving towards places where words wait for selection

A safer space

A gateway to creativity, honesty, risks, imagination and confidence.

I want to make the women feel comfortable, and I myself want to feel comfortable. We usually have a few new writers each time, and every one of them brings her own unique ideas to chat, think, and write about. Within each workshop, I attempt to make each writer feel comfortable expressing whatever those things may be.

- *Write about a time you wandered with intention.*

4. *SpeakOut!*

your mind.

Unleash your thoughts.

Tell us what we have been dying to hear,

Your voice.

We write about someone we love,
about our siblings,
about those who have hurt us.

We become so engrossed in what we're writing.

We tell the writers to come as they are, to write as they wish, to read what they'd like. Maybe I'd like to do that as well.

- *Write about a time when your voice was heard/felt powerful.*

5. *Share*

their voice, their stories.
Some days they are timid,
shy.

Then, the group applauds,
taken away by their words.

Here we are, in a sacred space.

I could see thoughts churning in everyone. We sat in silence for some time. It was an agreed-upon and necessary silence where every writer and facilitator mulled an idea we may have never had before— or not for a long time.

- *Write about a time you enjoyed silence.*

6. *...to linger on words...*

All that was created in one hour did not exist before.

When our time ends, everyone lingers, talking about their future writing plans, sharing stories, discussing ideas for next week. The time goes by so fast, I feel like I am never ready for it to end. I walk to my car, the words falling away from me briskly as the other parts of life flood back in: *Who has homework? Are the dishes done? Who needs picking up? What did I forget today?*

I hold my notebook, wanting to linger.

Write.

Author Bios

Constance Davis is a graduate of Colorado State University with a major in Ethnic Studies and a concentration in Sociology. She has expanded her skills of critical analysis in psychology and criminal justice, where her interests are most prevalent.

Grace Dotson is a senior sociology and criminology major at Colorado State University. She became involved with the Community Literacy Center at CSU when she started as a volunteer for Speakout! in the Spring of 2022 at the Fort Collins Mission. Since then, she has been an intern for the community literacy center and facilitated creative writing workshops at AspenRidge recovery center. Grace has cherished her time meeting writers and building community through writing in the Fort Collins area. Grace feels passionate that creative work fosters empathy and understanding and plans to continue work that centers on uplifting the voices and stories of others throughout her life.

Tobi Jacobi and **Mary Ellen Sanger** direct the Community Literacy Center in the English Department at Colorado State University. The CLC's mission remains focused on creating and facilitating literacy opportunities that invite community members to engage in innovative and supportive writing spaces and to value the writing and art that emerges through conversation and circulation

Mia Manfredi is a fourth-year student at Colorado State University. She has a major in English with a concentration in Creative Writing and a minor in Sociology. Mia is an aspiring activist, artist, and writer. She enjoys writing and reading YA fiction, painting, drawing, collaging, and volunteering within her community. She is very passionate about women's rights, educational equity, environmental justice, and economic justice!

Ainhoa Palacios is a fiction candidate in the MFA program at Colorado State University, as well as a graduate teacher for the English department. She enjoys writing fiction, and creative nonfiction and has been published in journals like Lumiere Review,

Somos En Escrito, and *Sunspot Literary Journal*. Her stories are often themed around Latinx characters, and the displacement commonly felt by immigrants and children of immigrants.

Tanya Sopkin is a second-year student at Colorado State University studying Sociology and a minor in English. Their works have been published in CSU's Literary Magazines *Spiritus Mundi* and *The Greyrock Review*, as well as the University of New Mexico's Literary Journal *Scribendi*. They love reading, blogging about TV shows and queer issues, and plan to go into Social Work after graduating.