

Class Chain Poems: April 23 & 26, 2010

1st

Like numerals on the clock below the muffled PA speaker
that say, without hands, how time seeps into the past,
I signal new days, new weeks, new years, new lessons. Yeah, right.
They are too busy partying in their cramped desks,
anticipating summer, white smiles sparkling as they
talk, talk, talk of friends in other classrooms,
sharing their childish laughter. And here I stand:
a dentist in my surgical mask and sterile white gloves,
eager to crack out their Chiclet teeth with my iron claws.
I'm ready for summer, too.

3rd

Like a sinister clock tick-tocking the seconds and minutes
ever closer to the final twelve, this ninth grade year creeps to a close.
These cold numbers in my math book, usually
tedious as reading the Bible, now seem almost friendly, familiar,
and the fat geography book, so massive, tattered, and heavy,
and the mouth-watering aroma of school lunch – yeah, I know
they ain't McDonald's French fries, but they're okay on an empty stomach –
and the backpacks, disfigured and bulky.
This is an American school...
...I'll miss it when I'm gone.

4th

The numbers on the clock can't move fast enough for me.
Like a rusty bike that creaks and wobbles,
stabbing my foot with a broken pedal spike,
this class pains me because it's late on a Friday afternoon, and they know
there is sunshine behind the shades, out there in the world where they will soon be.
A fungus, out of control and dripping
mucousy green globs on
my clothing, the tension in the room grows.
I, the teacher, feeling naked against the onslaught
of Braden's endless talk of sex and the
subtle mysteries of females, which he'll never understand,
repeat "Shh...shh..shhhhhhhhhhh" like a punctured bike tire.
Is summer here yet?

6th

When the alarm clock buzzes, breaking the silent dark
and the furnace ticks, preparing to roar to life,
I am bugged not only that I must
rise from slumber, an ant lion peering
from his sandy hole, angry red and hungry,
but also at this ferocious fire of hair, framing my face like a mane
as I rise from that camping bag
in a cold tent on a mountain far from home.
I couldn't return to sleep if I wanted to, but I don't.
Let the daydreams begin!

7th

Like clockwork, at the appointed day and hour
of his passing, Grandfather's wisdom comes back to me:
"Stay young, my boy, stay young!"
Restoring classic cars in his musty garage,
he made them shiny with engines that purred.
His toys, he called them – and I'm sure he enjoyed them
far more than I did my yo-yo.
One hot summer afternoon,
he gunned his cherry red Camero at the corner
by the hydrant where
dogs were peeing and
boys laughed.
He was one of them again.

8th

Beneath the clock on the classroom wall, a board
on which I have written a thousand times, in red and purple marker, the assignments
that will be submitted late or not at all.
Like dead bodies in
cold coffins, the pale excuses
bleed my enthusiasm: vampires!
Blood, red and coppery-tasting, pulses from my pen.
I am a surgeon, hacking away cancerous commas and excising infected prose.
No amount of money is worth suffering their careless efforts,
But the thoughtful ones – they are diamonds
sparkling in this teacher's cynical smile.