

# Poetry Behind the Walls

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PBW is a collaborative project between Save the Kids, Le Moyne College's Center for Urban and Regional Applied Research, SUNY Cortland's Criminology Department, the journal *Social Advocacy and Systems Change*, and Hillbrook Youth Detention Center.

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The goal of PBW is to provide space for youth to express themselves nonviolently. By youth being published it supports and encourages them.

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Archives of Poetry Behind the Walls can be found at Social Advocacy and Systems Change: <http://www.cortland.edu/ids/sasc/index.htm>

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## Acknowledgments

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# Stress

By: Teeon

Stress is something I have all the time.

Stress.

Stress is something I carry .

Stress.

Stress is what I have in Hillbrook.

Stress is what people die from.

Stress tears families apart.

Stress is what got me in here.

Stress breaks me down like a puzzle.

# My First Poem to Start a New Ending

By: Romeo

Gone, but not for long,  
I know it's my fault.  
I really did wrong.  
Now I'm gone,  
But not for long.  
Thinking about you all day long.  
I know I did you wrong.  
You are telling me to stay strong,  
Telling me you're thinking about me from dusk 'til dawn.  
You say I'm gone.  
You're right.  
But not for long.  
Without you I wouldn't be strong.

# Life on the Outside

By: Terris

Life on the Outside:

I thought it was cool,  
to not go to school,  
and not follow my sister's rules.

Life on the Outside:

Smoking weed was my thing to do,  
robbing people to buy weed and sneakers,  
it was cruel, but it was cool.

Life on the Outside:

Stay out late,  
stay up late,  
risking my fate.

Life on the Outside:

Crooked cops,  
beat you down,  
just because you're black and brown.

Life on the Outside:

Drugs and guns,  
get passed to the youth,  
people get shot and die;  
the news doesn't always lie.

Life on the Outside:

I cry every night,  
wondering if my family is alright.

# Life in Hillbrook

By: Terris

Life in Hillbrook:

New people,  
new faces,  
new things.

Life in Hillbrook:

Happy when you go.  
Sad when you stay.  
Mad when your friends leave.

Life in Hillbrook:

The start of a new life.  
The end of your old life.

Life in Hillbrook

# Hatred

By: Terris

Why hate on me:

Because you're not me,  
Or because you want to be me?

Why hate on me:

Do you want to take a walk in my shoes,  
Do what I do?

Why hate on me:

Do you want to look the way I look,  
Smile the way I smile,  
Eat the way I eat,  
Walk the way I walk,  
Or talk the way I talk?

Why hate on me:

I know why;  
Because you're simply not me.

That's why you hate on me.

# Shoes

By: Makayla

People see me,  
I see them too.  
Can you tell a person by their shoes?  
Was your family on the news?

People are unique.  
Grandma's house is antique.  
But could you tell by her shoes?

Everyone is different,  
But you are who you are.  
You can try to change,  
Or you can stay the same.

But could you tell by someone's shoes?

# Hillbrook

By: Christopher

Hillbrook is like life gone wrong;  
Get in here and it is gone.

Kill a man  
Or steal a bill;  
The survival is the same  
And it's never going to change

Feel the pain,  
Join a gang,  
Shoot somebody,  
Get some putty.

# I am a Girl

By: Sharice

I have money,  
But I'm not rich.  
I have been through a lot of rough times, good times, and fun times.

I grew up without a father,  
A mother that was always there for me,  
And she was like my best friend.

I have four sisters;  
They are all different.  
One sister likes to party,  
Another likes to party too,  
And another likes to go school.  
My brother,  
He is just a boy.

Now I'm up in jail,  
Because my safety was bad on the street.  
I made mistakes,  
And I messed up,  
Because I didn't go to school.

Now I have to pay,  
And do my time.

Now I am lonely  
Without my man.

I wish I were at home wearing my own clothes.

# Love

By: Felicia

Love can hurt,  
Love can hate,  
No matter what,  
It's with your mate.  
Love makes you want to date.

When you love somebody,  
They never go away,  
When you sleep,  
You always think about them.  
When you kiss the one you really love,  
It makes it all okay.

When you get into fights and arguments,  
They will never go away,  
They always stay on your side.

If you stay,  
I'll never go;  
But if I do go,  
I will be up there watching you every day.  
That's how I love you.

We know we love one another;  
But when we both die,  
We will always be together.

# Hate

By: Shonquaysha

You say you hate him,  
But you're really mad  
Because he's late.

Love, passion, wisdom,  
You believed in him.

Love makes you want to hate,  
Because your man is always late.

When you have a date,  
He never shows up.  
Then you want to hate.

He's been cheating, lying, and forgetting  
That you're the one, who took him in out of the cold,  
Fed him, clothed him, trusted in him.  
Then you have no other choice but to hate.

# Break Up

By: Shonquaysha

When you break up,  
You make up.

When you care for someone,  
You typically are fear to someone.

When you hold them, squeeze them, love them, and care for them,  
They just fade away.

When you love them,  
They just want to escape.

You think they're your everything,  
But they're really not.

And if that is love,  
That gives me liberty and courage to go inside,  
And see who I really am.

I have to identify myself that way,  
Because that's who I am.

# How Much Pain

By: Shonquaysha

How much pain could one's heart take,  
before I make a big mistake?

When you trust someone,  
and give them your all,  
they pick you up and let you fall.

When you trust, love, and care,  
you want someone to hold you like a bear.

When you give your heart to someone,  
you are going to regret it,  
because they're going to knock you down.

That's why you need courage to love someone,  
who won't take you for granted.

That's why everyday I wonder,  
how much pain my heart can take.

# Locked Up

By: Chris

You're locked up now,  
And don't know how to get out.  
And make them \*\* pout  
Between win or lose.  
If you're locked up for good,  
You only have one life;  
You might as well,  
Go to death row.

If you go out in a fight,  
It might as well be tonight,  
It's your choice.  
Only you can choose the right path.  
Good or bad you better hope it's right.  
Otherwise it might just be your very last night.

# Love

By: Emily

I look at you and smile,  
Hoping you'll stay awhile.

I don't want your kisses and hugs teasing me;  
I don't want your hand holding mine,  
Unless you swear that you need me.

I get butterflies in my tummy,  
When you call me hunny.

# Future

By: Genny

Day and night  
I've been thinking:

What will happen if I get out?  
So many things we can do,  
And so many things to say.

But the most important thing on my mind:  
How did I feel about staying in Hillbrook?

But the thing was,  
I felt no one else but mine,  
And it was real.

# My Struggle

By: Bruce

Have you ever tried to cry,  
But the tears won't come out?

I'm locked behind razor wire;  
They won't let me out.

Sometimes I wonder,  
Where will I go,  
Heaven or hell,  
Or sit inside a cell,  
Waiting for bail?  
Only time will tell.

# Your World

By: Makayla

What do you do when everyone you love is gone?  
Does your world come to an end,  
Or does your world still revolve?

Would you just give up,  
Or would you fight for your world?

Would you fight the fight to stand up for yourself?  
Would you be honest or lie?  
Would you rather win or lose?  
Would you rather sacrifice or be selfish?  
Would your world end?  
Would you still fight if your world came to an end?

When it came to an end?

# God

By: Makayla

I am a child.  
I have a mother,  
I have a father,  
But God gave me life.

Everything happens for a reason.  
God will always forgive you.  
God holds you down during the worst,  
And walks with you during the best.

I am God's child.  
God will forgive you,  
But that does mean you should take advantage of God?  
No, I think not.  
Some people think yes,  
That is wrong.  
But could it be right?  
Everything happens for a reason.

# Who Am I?

By: Makayla

Who am I?  
I don't know.  
My dad is an alcoholic,  
The signs are symbolic.  
We are in and out of jail.  
The worst part is,  
When are we going to get out?

I want to scream and shout.  
We all make mistakes,  
But how many does it take?  
I messed up big,  
You dig?

Who am I?  
I don't know.  
My mom is successful,  
Tougher than a bull.  
I put her through a lot,  
To see this pain.  
I would rather get shot.

So who am I like?  
Mom or Dad?  
I'm two in one.

Days go by,  
I'm me.  
More and more enthusiastic, pretty and fantastic.

Who am I?  
I am me,  
Two in one.

# Hillbrook

By: Makayla

I just need to leave.  
It's not a want,  
It's a need

You try to grow up too fast.  
You want to be free,  
Free at last

Here the free is dead.  
You never want to get out of bed.  
Here you get overfed.

I just need to leave.  
Let the crimes have an end.

# I am ...

By: Makayla

I am bright,  
Brighter than light,  
The brightest thing in sight.

I am against a fight.  
I love, but I bite.

I am short, small in height.  
I need to sleep at night to grow taller,  
Lose weight, and be smaller.

I'm a hood baller.  
This is boring.  
I'm going to go to sleep;  
I'll be up in the morning.

# Why?

By: Makayla

Why do we love?  
We love because our hearts let us.

Why do we hurt?  
We hurt because our hearts let us.

Why do we trust?  
We trust because our hearts let us.

Why do we care?  
We care because our hearts lets us.

Why do we try?  
We try because our hearts let us.

So why do our hearts let us?

# Tough Love

By: Makayla

When he says he loves you,  
don't say it back.

When he says he will never leave your side,  
don't believe him.

When he says he wants you to be his baby's mother,  
tell him "NO".

Because when you go through his phone  
and it says, "I Love you," to some other girl,  
he's showing you he doesn't love you.  
But say it back and watch him cross you.

So when he says he loves you,  
don't say it back,  
because when you are talking to him on the phone,  
he's not next to you;  
and he is too busy breaking another girl's heart.

So when he says he will never leave your side,  
don't believe him,  
because when you have his baby,  
he says he will be right back  
and you will never see him again.  
And then he shows you he only wanted what's in between your legs.

So when he tells you he wants you to be his baby's mother,  
say "NO".

# My Life

By: Zach

My life is snowboarding.

My life is horrible.

My life is scary.

My life is busy.

My life is fun.

My life is great.

My life is painful.

My life is basketball.

My life is football.

My life is hockey.

My life is music.

My life is drawing.

My life is lucky.

My life is life.

# Who Am I?

By: Unknown

I am me, myself, and I.  
I am a man that likes to live.  
I am a menace to society.  
I am alone in this world.  
I am a dog trying to find its way.  
I am a person that experienced violence.  
I am a person with a kind heart but nobody knows.  
I am not what people think I am.  
I've seen people get robbed and shot.  
I've heard teachers talk about me.  
I've heard people put me down.  
But I walk away with no approval.  
But I know I can do better.  
I've seen people get stabbed.  
I've seen people rob other people,  
And I know because I am one of them.  
But I am not sometimes when I choose to be good.  
Who am I?  
I am me, myself, and I.