

Camille Dungy

Because it looked hotter that way

we let our hair down. It wasn't so much that we worried about what people thought or about keeping it real but that we knew this was our moment. We knew we'd blow our cool

sooner or later. Probably sooner. Probably even before we got too far out of Westmont High and had kids of our own who left home wearing clothes we didn't think belonged in school.

Like Mrs. C. whose nearly unrecognizably pretty senior photo we passed every day on the way to Gym, we'd get old. Or like Mr. Lurk who told us all the time how it's never too late

to throw a Hail Mary like he did his junior year and how we could win everything for the team and hear the band strike up a tune so the cheer squad could sing our name, too. Straight

out of a Hallmark movie, Mr. Lurk's hero turned teacher story. We had heard it a million times. Sometimes he'd ask us to sing with him, *T-O-N-Y-L-U-R-K Tony Tony Lurk Lurk Lurk. Sin*

ironia, con sentimiento, por favor, and then we would get back to our Spanish lessons, opening our thin textbooks, until the bell rang and we went on to the cotton gin

in History. Really, this had nothing to do with being cool. We only wanted to have a moment to ourselves, a moment before Jazz Band and after Gym when we could look in the mirror and like it. June

and Tiffany and Janet all told me I looked pretty. We took turns saying nice things, though we might just as likely say, Die and go to hell. Beauty or hell. No difference. The bell would ring soon.

With thanks to "We Real Cool" by Gwendolyn Brooks

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Stefanie Wortman 1/17/2016 2:31 PM

Comment [1]: This poem is written in the "golden shovel" form created by the poet Terrance Hayes. A "golden shovel" is a 24-line poem that uses all 24 words in "We Real Cool" at the ends of its lines. If you read down the right margin of "Because it looked hotter that way," you will see how Brooks' poem inspired the form.

Stefanie Wortman 1/17/2016 2:32 PM

Comment [2]: Like "We Real Cool," this poem ends on the word "soon," which emphasizes the fleeting time it captures. The speaker claims at the beginning of the poem, "this was our moment," but also has a clear sense that it would not last. Later in the poem, she says, "We only wanted to have a moment to ourselves..."