

Spinning Straw into Gold – A Teacher’s Plight
Sheryl Lain

They toss the shocks at my feet.
The king requires gold.
Four walls stare me down.

I’d spin the yellow into gold
with all my heart
if I could
against all odds,
making good falsehood’s promise.

In the dark,
I wrestle alone to do the impossible.

A visitor,
who never belonged in a classroom,
trades counterfeit help
for my desperation.

The trade is not fair.
My faith in good intentions
steals away the sun.

What name shall I call you
to retrieve my soul,
Rumpelstiltskin?

Author’s note: I wrote Spinning Straw into Gold after a teacher friend told me she just resigned mid-year. Her supervisor required her to replace writing workshop, where students grew from writing four lines a day to four pages, with a canned grammar program. “Look at this writing,” her boss told her as she overlooked the kids’ journal ideas. “The kids can’t spell!”



Before participating in the Wyoming Writing Project, Sheryl was a closet poet, never dreaming of sharing her little snippets about her students with them. But when she did give the poems to students, they wrote her back. Tom Romano’s lines of trust crisscrossed the classroom. Besides teaching, Sheryl is a national presenter and has published poems, essays and monographs. Sheryl loves kids and the teachers who teach them. She can be contacted at sheryllain@aol.com.

*The poems that follow are titled for students, all pseudonyms.

Ryan Sheryl Lain

You dream
of another world
where reality is measured in drumbeats
and stories are told in guitar chords.

The music world mirrors at times the chaos and pain
of the real one
where parents lock the door with you outside
and your grandma falls ill.

But here, waiting for the bell,
you reject parsing and rules
as not just irrelevant but heresy.
No match for the integrity
of drumbeat and guitar whine.

Hale Sheryl Lain

You learned science young:
years of fluid movement down the country road,
you, your bicycle, the earth
synchronized.
You knew the physics of balance,
pressing your leg muscles against the curve of black asphalt,
riding heat wrinkles.
You took the corners
faster than the safe speed of black tires' grip on summer soft surface.

Prisoner of time from bell to bell,
you daydream.
Like Einstein, you know your energy still spins
somewhere out there,
another boy maybe, another bike, another country road
You both skim the heat waves
defying too much measured time.

Thank you for all you have given me this year it has been more beneficial than any other subject in school and it is something that I can never repay you for, you understood what others did not and that is something that means a lot. Hale.