

English 180, Second Place; Professor, Dr. Rebekah Buchanan

Welcome to Poetry Club

Christine Jordan

Walking into the classroom after the final school bell on that Friday, I wasn't really sure what I was expecting from that day in Poetry Club. I saw some people I knew from my clique and of course I sat with them. Who else would I be willing to be seen with? Ms. Stackle, our

She was known as the ‘devil in disguise’ with her 60’s loafers and too short pants. When she walked anywhere, students would scurry away like roaches hit with a light. She was the Dean of Students of my private school and she made all the students shiver. “Now, now, now students you know those poems have to run past me? They have to follow the standards in the academic handbook. We want our school to be represented at the highest level possible. Anything that is considered inappropriate must be removed or you will be unable to participate in the contest. Now could you pass all of your poems to the front?” My heart died a little: why is she judging our pieces for things like ‘What is acceptable?’ and ‘Does this follow the school code?’ The judges at the poetry contest don’t know anything about what the school’s mission is or what the guidelines are: they want raw and honest poetry. I was being challenged because I

revision later next week.' I swear as soon as I walked away I wanted to cry. How dare you try to censor the experiences in my life that are in my poetry? All of this just because of what backlash the school could face? I thought the school would stand with its students through anything. I guess I thought wrong. This school wasn't about being an individual: it was about fitting into their mold and acting as a spokesperson so they could gain donations. It had nothing to do with poetry.

After meeting with her, I had an unpleasant taste in my mouth. It had nothing to do with the fact that I was telling a story that needed to be told. It wasn't about trying to discuss things that the Black community doesn't like to know about. The only reason I had to change what I was saying was simply because 'it could offend some people'; that it could possibly make someone uneasy. All of the issues the group discussed were controversial: girls with low self-esteem issues, gun violence, rape, a divorce, etc. How can you censor real life? Why was my school putting up these roadblocks for this group? Is it because poetry doesn't have a clear right or wrong? It is because poetry isn't some controlled habit where there is a clear right and wrong? Then, something 'clicked' in my brain: I realized that the success of my school was only because they could control everyone and everything so that it teaches discipline (discipline= success). As soon as the Poetry Club tried to push the boundaries, the school staff had to swoop in and control it. (I expected nothing less.)

After I submitted my revision, I was able to participate in the contest. However, my view on my personal freedom was changed. I was used to being able to say as I wish without anything

was about contributing to society with my views and ideas. But in that type of controlled atmosphere, it was necessary to give up some of personal freedom in doing so; I wasn't able to describe my individual life my own way.