

*Mika Lafond**Poetry***teacher notes**

a boy
 17 years old, maybe 18 or 21
 it's one of them and all of them

sleeping on a couch in his father's house
 where is his mother?
 left a baby behind to fend off the drunks
 the only world he knows

he walks into my classroom
 saunters, actually
 rejection written on his face
 he tries to hide it with a smirk

walls
 blanket "whatevers" for every question
 not at-risk, he's alone
 sent to me because

"he doesn't want to be here"
 in this one room, in this neglectful school
 children are allowed to be children

a bowl of fruit on my desk is supposed to last a
 week
 he gazes at it

hungry
 because beer is more important than bread in
 his house
 I leave the room

when I return a banana peel drapes the garbage

my bowl of fruit lasts a day

the lady in the kitchen doesn't ask why I buy
 him lunch
 every single day

why bother to explain?
 I never have a single behavior problem

I watch closely

observe false bravado
 need for attention

a child who believes he can't be loved
 because no one ever told him
 I do

he's always tired on cheque day
 math can wait until his mind recovers calm
 his ears recuperate
 fists crashing, bottles breaking, voices
 he couldn't block out as his body tossed on the
 couch

one day I give him a ball
 his hands know what to do
 react, don't think
 something he's had to do in every situation in
 his life
 if dad is staggering
 react, don't think

winter grips
 his dad buys a case instead of a jacket
 one morning I give him shoes
 and a jacket
 walls fall down
 it's the first time he smiles
 no, it's the first time he understands I see him

every day

as he walks out the door I call to him
 Have a good night! I want to see you tomorrow
 so be safe!

he talks, he reads, he writes, he plays basketball
 I teach

he still sleeps after cheque day
 I still let him
 he snores sometimes
 sometimes he dreams
 the outside world has changed