

- **Advocating for the Public  
Education of Minority Students:**

- **What's Needed to Enable Students  
to Use Their Voices?**

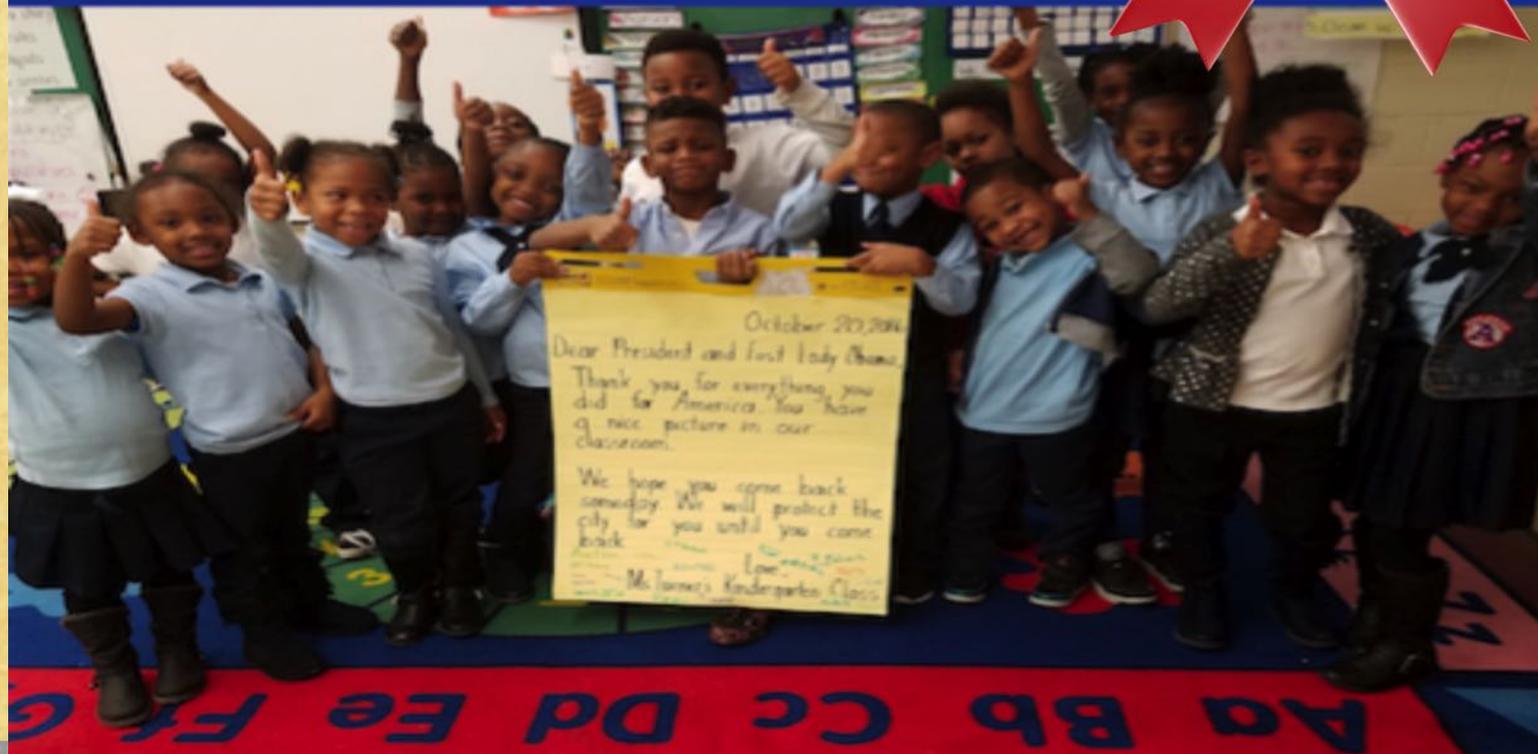
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# For the Obamas: A Big Book of Thank Yous

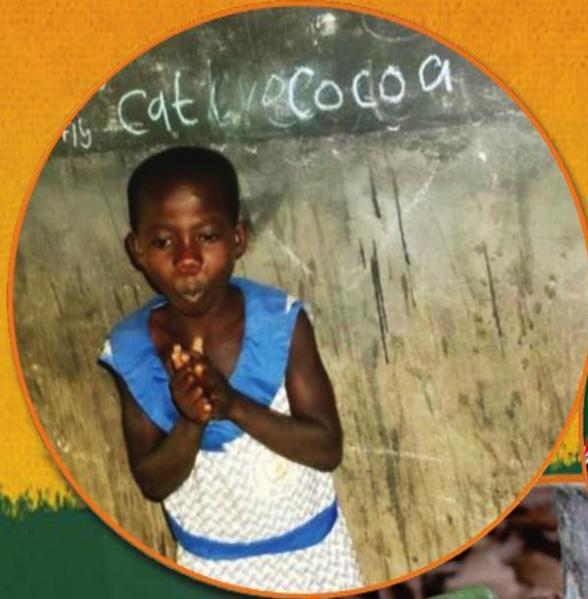
Concord Elementary Students  
District Heights, MD  
Prince George's County Schools

Letter from  
President Obama  
Inside!

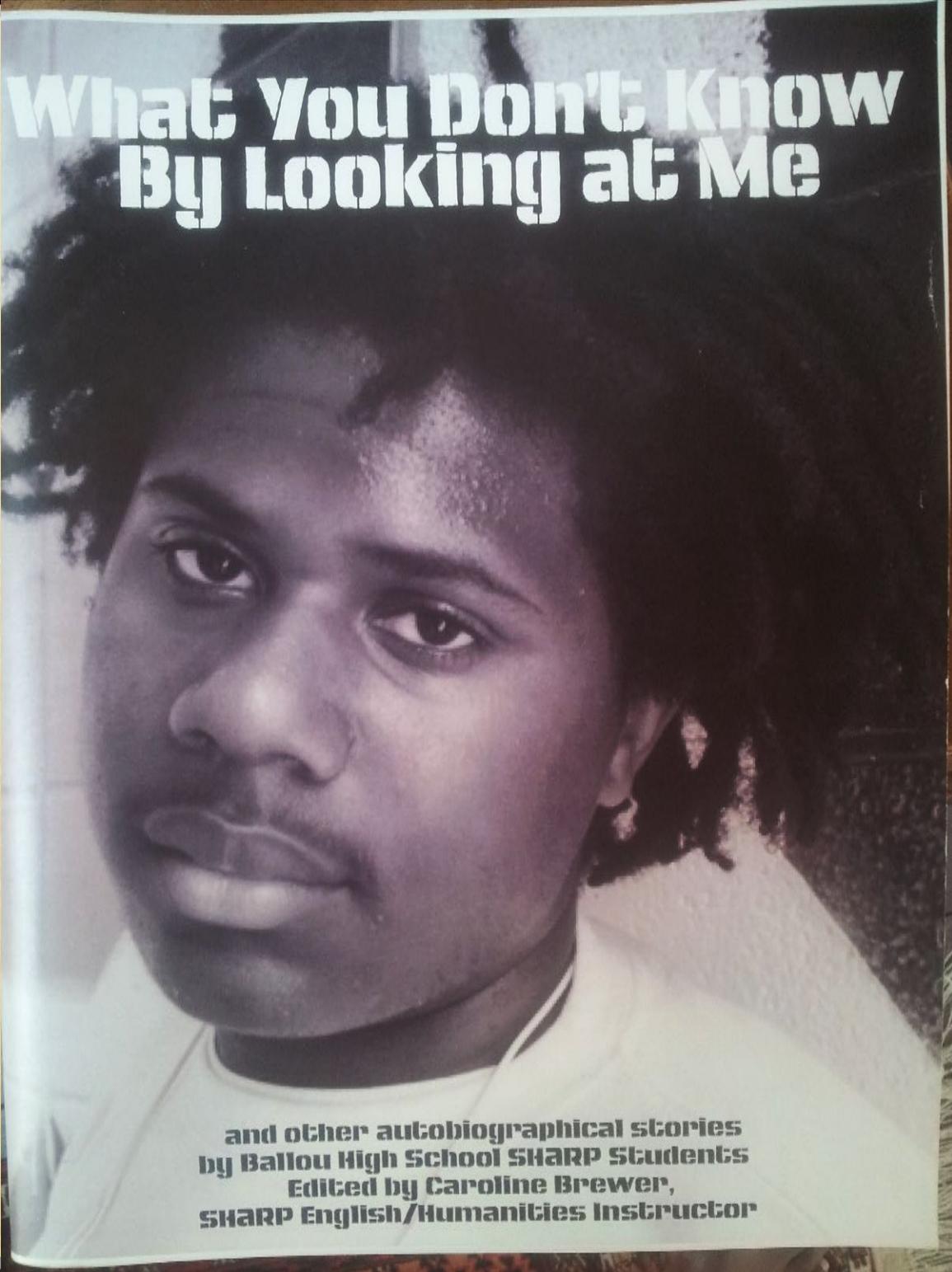


# C is for Cocoa

An Alphabet Book about Ghana, West Africa,  
and the food, plants, and animals in its environment



By Caroline Brewer, Kimmoly Rice-Ogletree, Madam Victoria Gyinaku  
& Her 3rd Grade Students at Timber Junction-Nkwanta  
Konko Village School



# **What You Don't Know By Looking at Me**

**and other autobiographical stories  
by Ballou High School SHARP Students  
Edited by Caroline Brewer,  
SHARP English/Humanities Instructor**

# Three Things You Should Know

- Know that they are as hungry to succeed as they would be to eat if they'd gone a week without food.
- Know that many consider opportunities to write and express themselves as exciting, exhilarating, and scary as walking across hot coals, jumping out of a plane, learning to swim, or simply open up their hearts to “strangers”.
- Know that what they write about must mean something *to them*. Inspiring voice means providing choice.

# The Word Party

## Three Things I Fed Them

- To acknowledge the hunger: Why Do I Read?/Why Do I Write? Poems and Discussions about why we read and write.
- To conquer the fear: *Shared Life Doesn't Frighten Me at All* – poem by Maya Angelou. We read it interactively and discussed what it meant to us.
- To respect their voices, gave writing choices on topics. Some students explored: *Thank you letters and cards, Foods, Family Traditions, Physical environment,*

# **My overarching strategy**

## **Build confidence**

Writing is talking on paper.  
If you can talk, you can  
write. So, talk to me.

# Celebrate

Loudly and humorously.  
Celebrate every step taken,  
every word written, every  
draft completed.

# **Exercise Extreme Patience**

Breath, smile, hum, sing...

Rinse, repeat.



*Dear Mr. President and Mrs. Obama,  
Thank you for everything you did for America. You have a nice picture in our  
classroom. We hope you come back some day. We will protect the city until you  
come back. - Love, Ms. Turner's Kindergarten Class*

“It’s funny how I wasn’t fully knowledgeable of the times you were helping this  
world.” - 6th grader

“You must have done some great things to make millions of people vote for  
you.... You’re also one of the only presidents I remember.” - 6th grader

“Can you buy me a puppy?” – 2nd grader

“My family would like to see you. I live in the first house on Swann Road.” – 4th  
grader

“I loved the wonderful days of you being president.” – 3rd grade

“Hope you see me in your dreams and heart too.” – 2nd grader

# Pre-K students decorate cards





# 5th graders work on TY Flag stars



# 5th graders work on TY Flag stripes



# The Thank You Flag

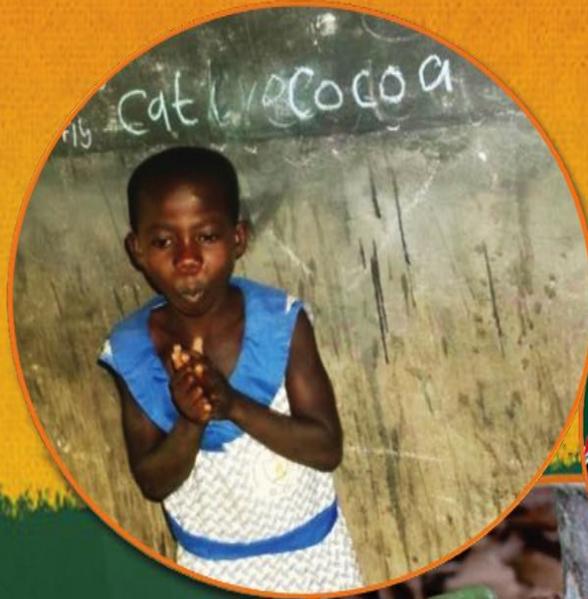


# For the Obamas: Results

- Nearly every one of Concord Elementary's 400 students contributed to a class card or letter, or wrote an individual letter, that was mailed to the Obamas before they departed office in early 2017.
- In the three months after National Day on Writing, students who had refused to write – including those designated for SPED services, were making their pencils, pens, and words move with authority and poignancy.
- They volunteered to read works aloud. They crawled out of MS Word's black hole and learned to compose with the darn thing. By mid-January, all 250 students I taught were much more comfortable writing. Not one

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**A** is for ant and avocado, in Mexico known as avogato.

**B** is bamboo. B is for bread, and butterflies soaring overhead.

**C** is for chocolate, smooth and sweet, and cocoa, which makes the treats we eat, and coconuts on trees, 80 feet!

C is for Cocoa came from a literacy mission to Ghana, sponsored by LEAP for Ghana, founded by Author Kwame Alexander.

I was one of about 18 authors and educators who traveled to Ghana to provide literacy workshops for 300 teachers, mostly from the Accra region of Ghana, and to work for two half days in a classroom at the Timber Junction Nkwanta School in Konko Village.

My assignment on the first day was to work with a 3rd grade class to write an alphabet book about their environment, food, and culture. My teaching partner, Kimmoly Rice-Ogletree and I chose the topic and took the photos. The students chose the words. I returned to the U.S. to write the story, edit, and publish the book.

Kimmoly and I spent our own money to make the trip and, with donations, publish and publicize the book.

Sales proceeds allow us to donate books to Ghanaian children.

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te sister  
meal  
ken hot  
her please  
ren welcom  
her banana

Madam Caroline & Madam Kimmoly

3rd October, 2013

at ant bat banana Cat Cocoa Duck

Umbrella Tree Pine apple Vulture Xylophone Yam  
Dag Soap

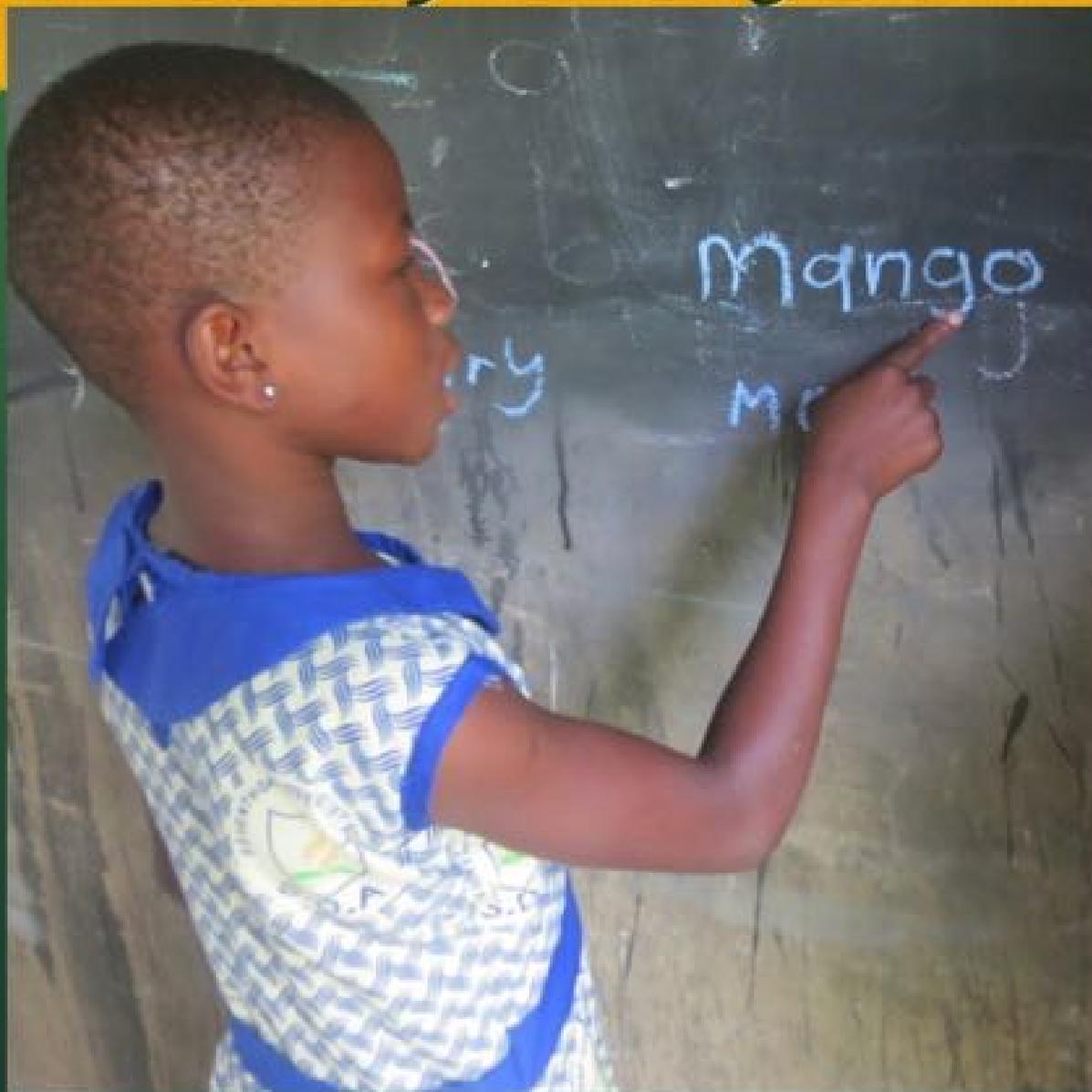




*and butterflies  
soaring overhead.*



*M is for Mango*

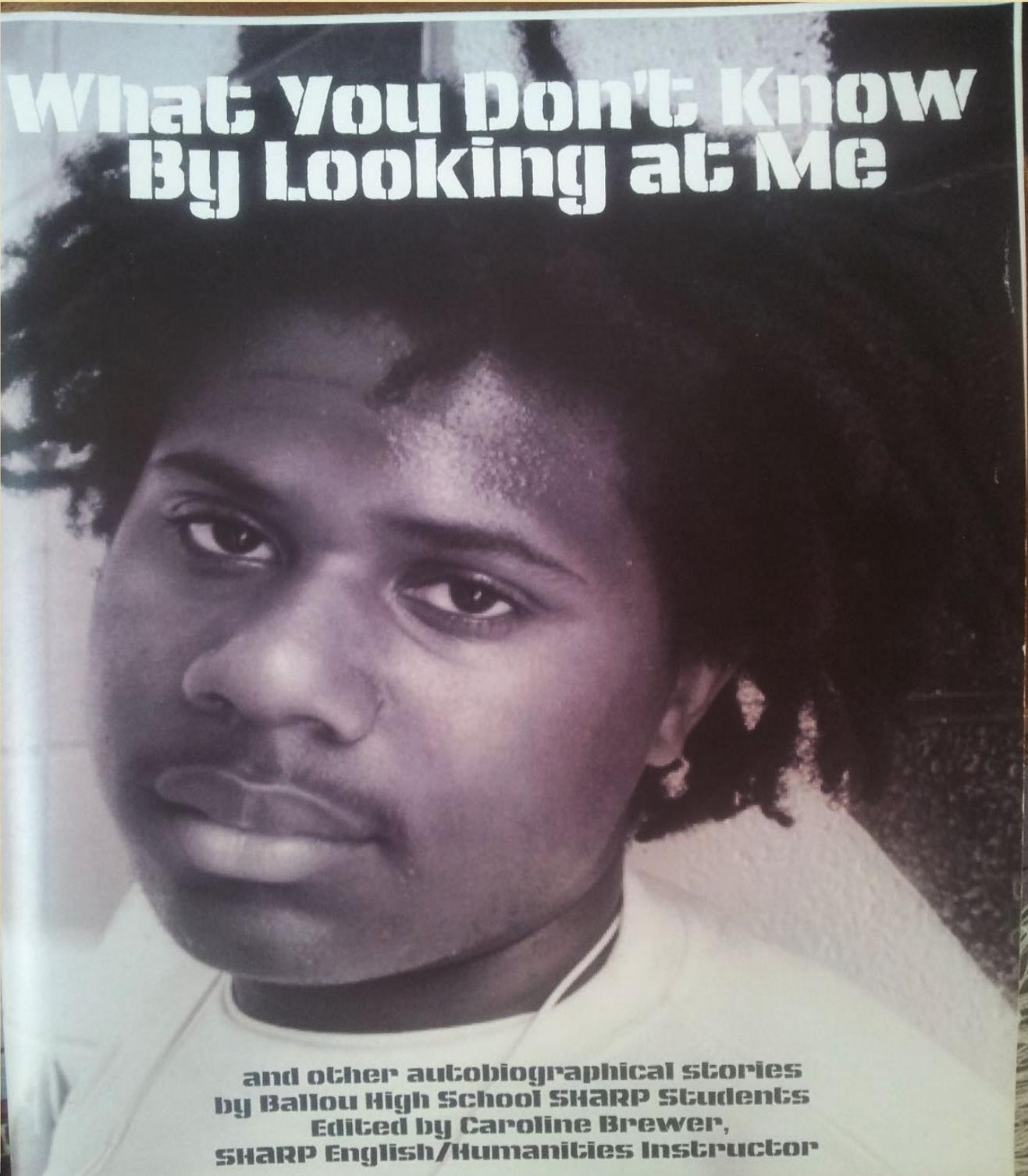






# C is for Cocoa: Results

- We worked with students for about three hours in one day to generate the words to the alphabet book.
- Every student in the 3rd Grade Class contributed words to the book.
- James was born as a student. He had not smiled, spoken, or participated in any classroom activity during the three weeks he had been in school. After I noticed he wasn't participating, I invited him to contribute "sugarcane" to the book. He came up to the



**What You Don't Know  
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# What You Don't Know by Looking at Me

- This project was part of a 5 1/2 week summer school program. 33 DC high school students, ranging from 9th grade to recent high school graduate. Most students were enrolled in Special Education services.
- 90 minutes a day – Half spent reading. Half spent writing.
- Reading levels ranged from K to 9th grade. Only one student was on grade level. Average grade level was about 4th grade.
- Some students attended just one week of the 5 ½ weeks of the summer session.

- **What You Don't Know By Looking at Me by Joe**
- That I am a good football player. I played wide receiver. I like to box.
- I can sing a little bit and I like to write sometimes, by myself.
- My singing group's name was BTG. It was five of us, but the last time I went into the studio, I just thought it was so stupid, I didn't want to go no more.
- I am a solid guy. I can hold my ground.
- I live in Southeast in the hood where niggaz get they azz shot or killed.
- It's hard out here in the streets All y'all old heads don't know what us kids going through.

## I Am From by Stephanie

- I am from a huge family of annoying little boys and girls who talk too much;
- A mother who sleeps late on weekends, so we eat breakfast for lunch.
- I am from big Sunday dinners and huge family cookouts, kids running around making me shout.
- I am from broken arms and busted up knees.
- I am from my mother, who pushed her sister off of a tree.
- I am from overprotective uncles, cousins, and brothers, who get on my nerves.

# What You Don't Know: Results

- Ruth smiled for the first time, after I sat with her to finish her essay, where she opened up about conflict with her mother and feeling

# 7 Lessons Learned

- *Believe in your students, yourself -- and magic.*
- *Acknowledge every little step they take.*
- *Ask for help.*
- *Use computers!*
- *Bend, shake, rattle, and roll with the punches.*
- *Laugh!*
- *Keep going! Keep going! Keep going!*

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