

Skraw

(n.)

pronunciation¹: /skrô/

1. the coarse pseudonym for hay; fodder for feeding, material especially for weaving
2. Black children open up their mouths and somebody's grandparent tumbles out, *Thank you, baby. Don't eem worry 'bout it.* There are no silly geese for them, no lucky ducks, no gilded infantilization of a childhood as fragile as a golden egg.
 - a. I'm watching a group of second graders argue over who will turn next—insults made magnificent through claps and pointing—when I notice her standing next to me. Holding the straps of the bright pink backpack over her shoulders in her fists, she squints through the cream-colored hair barrettes dangling in her face, “Do you know that when you sign somebody else's name on a piece of paper it's called forgery?” She rocks back and forth on her toes. “My

mama told me that.” From then on, I would call her the forgerist but to everyone else she was Kay Kay or Kanariyah, a name like some beautiful strange kind of bird. She was six, a rising first grader with a face so chubby and perfectly round that I sketched it for her twice. Twice, she took a black crayon and scribbled out her eyes, her nose, her mouth, until she was satisfied with her complete obliteration.

- b. For linguists, accessing the historical documentation of African American speech has always been problematic. The difficulties are compounded for vernacular speech that has been deemed unworthy of preservation by society.
3. Something of little or no value, trifle.
 - a. Technically, it wasn't a curse word, but it was light enough to be hurled across the playground like one. *Jit!* They spit it in each other's faces and smiled slyly at me before running. Technically, it wasn't a curse word. Admittedly, I had no idea what it meant. They broke it down: *It's like a little kid, like you being childish.*
Pejorative, US prison slang, an inexperienced, foolhardy young man. *Jit can't even hold a ball...*

- b. A child's world is ripe with gore.
They slip up and their precious
little faces burst open. They cry
for the jewels of blood spilt all
over the blacktop. They are
constantly faced with their own
mortality which has the effect of
making them more dangerous,
more brave, more sensible than
any of us.

- c. The trouble was that words as
they experienced them existed in
a different reality than words on
the page. The widening chasm
between the auditory and visual
made reading and writing
difficult and logically
impractical. The natural
response of many of the
kindergarteners was frustration
followed by dismissal.

4. a single dried stalk of grain, a particle
of multifarious use
of essence

Origins: black, specifically, American
Black, that Southern blue-black vernacular
warm as a mango-colored bruise; related to
the issue we Africans
will always have wit dem "t's"
where "str" becomes a hard swift "k"
think: skrong, and skruggle, and skreet
Deskroy her!
a flick of the tongue

just enough to change linguistic
course of direction

Sentence: *The first little pig's house was
built out of skraw!*

¹Pronunciation similar to “scrawl,” similar to letters sprawling all over the page, that kindergarten language that we are taught to edit out of ourselves through aligning the text left, starting at the top and making our way down to the somewhere. I had the fifth and sixth grade girls for an hour of creative writing during summer camp each day and the only way to get them to cooperate was to put them in the Everglades. It's day three. You've lost all your supplies in the rain storm and you can't find your way back to camp. Inexplicably, they made a way out of no way, slicing the heads off of alligators, eating panther raw before wearing it. They mumbled apologies to lizards then swallowed them whole while fighting through torrents of rain. They hid in the reeds under swollen blue moons and wrote their stories down on the beach in shark teeth and seashells for the helicopters circling above: *I AM HUNGRY AND I AM TIRED BUT I AM ALIVE.*