

## Aaron Counts / Words Worth poetry reading

Poet and fiction writer Aaron Counts is the lead engagement artist for Creative Justice, an arts-based alternative to incarceration for youth in King County and a long-time teaching artist with the Writers-in-the-Schools program. Aaron is the co-author of *Reclaiming Black Manhood*, and his poetry and prose has appeared in print and online, including *Lit Hub*, *Specter Magazine*, *Bestiary*, *Aldebaran Review*, *Rufous City Review* and *The Furnace* reading series. His first publication, however, was on his mother's old Kenmore refrigerator on 7<sup>th</sup> Street in Yakima, Washington.

### **My Name**

*after John Minczeski*

My name was coughed from the mouth of a volcano and floated  
in a cloud of ash toward the sea. It became netted in the sails  
of a three-masted schooner and was pulled by rough hands  
into the ship's dark hold. Shackled in that darkness, my name twisted  
in the puddles of sweat of the strange-tongued names  
held next to it. It called those names cousin.  
From time to time, it was forced onto the ship's deck where it cringed  
at the glare of an unfamiliar sun. Eventually, the ship lurched into port,  
and my name stumbled into the purse of a don't-call-me-English-man.  
He tightened his grip and laughed with a tobacco-stained sneer,  
while my name jingled in his clutch like coins. It emerged wordless  
in this man's home and found solace in the smile of his daughter,  
who treated my name like a pet, feeding it milk-soaked bread and morsels  
of bacon. With a soft voice, she read my name books in the shade  
of a black gum tree. In their secrets, she became my name, too.  
That's how I was born, making music in the emptiness,  
with my name laughing in the face of the wind.

### **Praise Song for Good Hair**

praise the smoky voice  
of the diva curling through the  
heavy air in the salon.  
praise the comfortable song that settles  
on your shoulders like a lazy cat. praise the lack  
of bass in the room. praise the treble, the strong  
spine of the women, and their patience.

praise patience. praise nimble fingers  
twisting locks into the head of a young  
boy, sleepy from a long day at school.  
praise dozing under the hot dryer, and rest  
when you can get it. praise the womb  
here in this room, and its softness.  
whenever possible, you must praise softness.

praise the magic brown hands conjure.  
the care, the intimate whisper in your ear.  
praise the song and the singing along.

praise the griot, the stories told  
by benevolent queens. praise the holding  
court, the not-caring. praise the checking  
of brothers, here and elsewhere,  
and the men who know not to try it.  
praise royalty and those that recognize it.  
praise the smiles, the clowning.  
praise the jokes black women tell  
only to each other, praise eavesdropping,  
and lessons learned. praise laughing,  
praise the laugh.

praise first loves and intimacy,  
the fingers that cradle  
your scalp. praise good hair,  
because it's all good hair.  
praise the almost-white light-skinned boy  
learning what it means  
to be black.