

high school. The building was wrecked in the storm. Our school, a charter school, is housed in modulars (my students hate this euphemism — they're trailers) in the lot in back. Sometimes I went and peeked in the windows of the old building, and it looked to me like no one had cleaned or gutted it since the storm. It was like a museum set piece. There was still a poster up announcing an open house, coming September 2005.

7.

I taught fifth-grade social studies, eighth-grade writing, ninth-grade social studies. Sometimes I felt inspired, sometimes deflated.

One time, a black student vehemently defended his one Arab classmate during a discussion about the Jena 6: "If you call him a terrorist, that's like what a cop thinks about us." Another day, when I was introducing new material about Africa, a student interrupted me — "I heard them niggas have AIDS!"

8. Pain, since I've lost you — I'm lost too

Our students are afraid of rain. A heavy morning shower can cut attendance in half. I once had a student write an essay about her experience in the Superdome. She wrote, without explanation, that she lost her memory when she lost her grandmother in the storm. I was supposed to correct the grammar, so that she would be prepared for state testing in the spring.

9. Keep your mouth closed and let your eyes listen

Lil Wayne is five-foot-six and wiry, sleepy-eyed, covered in tattoos, including teardrops under his eyes. His two camera poses are a cool tilt of the head and a sneer. He means to look sinister, I think, but there is something actually huggable about him. He looks like he could be one of my students — and some of my students like to think they look like him.

The other day, I saw Cornel West on television say that Lil Wayne's physical body bears witness to tragedy. I don't even know what that

means, but I do think that Wayne's artistic persona is a testament to *damage*.

10.

One of my favorite Lil Wayne hooks is the chorus on a Playaz Circle song called "Duffle Bag Boy." In the past year, he started singing more, and this was his best turn. He sounds a little like the neighborhood drunk at first as he warbles his way up and down the tune, but his singing voice has an organically exultant quality that seems to carry him to emotional delirium. After a while, he's belting out instructions to a drug courier with the breathy urgency of a Baptist hymn. By the end of the song, the standard-order macho boast, "I ain't never ran from a nigga and I damn sure ain't 'bout to pick today to start running," has been turned by Lil Wayne into a plea, a soul lament.

11.

On New Orleans radio, it seems like nearly every song features Lil Wayne. My kids sang his songs in class, in the hallways, before school, after school. I had a student who would rap a Lil Wayne line if he didn't know the answer to a question.

An eighth grader wrote his Persuasive Essay on the topic "Lil Wayne is the best rapper alive." Main ideas for three body paragraphs: Wayne has the most tracks and most hits, best metaphors and similes, competition is fake. 25

12. My flow is art, unique — my flow can part a sea

Once I witnessed a group of students huddled around a speaker listening to Lil Wayne. They had heard these songs before, but were nonetheless gushing and guffawing over nearly every line. One of them, bored and quiet in my classroom, was enthusiastically, if vaguely, parsing each lyric for his classmates: "You hear that? *Cleaner than a virgin in detergent*. Think on that."