



Lil Wayne

4.

Every few weeks, Michael or another student — for this piece, the names of my students have been changed — would have a new burned CD that was supposedly *Tha Carter III*, Lil Wayne's long-anticipated sixth studio album. "This one's official," they would say. I learned to be skeptical even as I enjoyed the new tracks. Nothing "official" would come



around until school was out for summer, but Lil Wayne created hundreds of new songs in 2007 and the first half of 2008. *Vibe* magazine took the time to rank his best seventy-seven songs of 2007, and that was not a comprehensive list. These songs would end up on the Internet, which downloaders could snag for free. He also appeared for guest verses on dozens of other rappers' tracks. He thusly managed to rate as the "Hottest MC in the Game" (according to MTV) and the "Best MC" (according to *Rolling Stone*), despite offering nothing new at the record store.

While Wayne claimed to do every song "at the same ability or hype," the quality varied widely. He wrote nothing down (he was simply too stoned, he explained), rapping off the top of his head every time the spirit moved him, which was pretty much all the time. The results were sometimes tremendous and sometimes awkward, but that was half the fun. His oeuvre ended up being a sort of unedited reality show of his wily subconscious.

5. Ain't 'bout to pick today to start running

During the first few days of school, Darius, one of my homeroom students, kept getting in trouble for leaving classes without permission. At the end of the second day, he pulled me aside to tell me why he kept having to use the bathroom: he had been shot in the leg three times and had a colostomy bag.

When I visited him in the hospital a few weeks later — he was there for follow-up surgery — he told me about the dealers who shot him. Darius's speaking voice is a dead ringer for Lil Wayne's old-man rasp. "I told them, Do what you need to do, you heard me? I ain't scared, you heard me?"

Then he leaned over and pointed, laughing, to *Sponge Bob* on the television.

6.

Lil Wayne, rumor has it, briefly went to the pre-Katrina version of our school. Same name and location, but back then it was a neighborhood