

*Second Place Winner*

## Aftermath

*Jillian Poché*

Why are pens  
always exploding  
in little boys' hands?  
Mid-lesson I spot  
the blue black ink

staining their perfect skin,  
splotches all over  
their nicked-up desks  
and marble notebooks.  
The pen dismantled.

They can never give  
details of the explosion.  
Rather look up at me  
with eyes that could inspire  
entire wars

and hold out their palms.  
Their silence softening me yet  
again. Throw the pen away,  
I say. Go wash your hands.  
Stop taking things apart.