

Playground Rules

Maia Joy

in elementary school gym class,
we had a saying—
“the tagger is always right,
but the tagger never lies.”

we all carried this lesson
on our backs. for the white kids,
this was a suit of armor;
for anyone else, any child
who wore “other” like a
bolded desk nameplate,
this was a target;

for the ones that had to ask
specifically for a different
set of crayons to capture
all the beauty in their families,
for the ones who stayed eerily quiet
as they watched their peers
study their own mother tongue
and opted to berate it anyways,
for the ones who knew that
playground games would never be
just playground games—

this was just the start.

Maia Joy is a queer biracial poet and musician from Boston, MA. A two-time Silver Key recipient from the Massachusetts Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, she is currently studying music and creative writing at the University of Maryland, College Park, where she is a member of the Jimenez-Porter Writers’ House. Some of her work can be found in Star 82 Review and JFA Human Rights Journal, as well as her social media @maiajoyspeaks, and her website maiajoyspeaks.wixsite.com/website.