

## THROUGH THESE DOORS

by

James E Cherry

Before the first bell,  
they're off the bus  
through metal detectors, searched  
with the wave of a wand.  
For an hour a couple days a week,

a handful gather in my room  
prior to the lunch hour.  
I am Artist in Residence  
and they are on suspension  
from regular school and must pay penance

in the halls of alternative learning.  
The student body arrives  
from single parent homes, if any parent at all,  
court ordered state custody or stints  
in juvenile detention centers.

Some days it all feels  
like a dress rehearsal  
for ten to twenty or life without  
parole in someone's institution.  
But at other times, a spark catches

while I'm scratching across a blackboard  
there is fire in their eyes threatening to rage  
towards dreams of college, entrepreneurship, family,  
the understanding that life holds endless possibilities,

who they can become, is bigger  
than the walls erected around them.  
At 3 p.m., they run  
out of our lives  
pass the scrutinizing eye of the security guard

with a semi-automatic strapped to his hip  
and I wonder  
as move into the distance, headed home,  
will sundown bring enough food and mercy  
to deliver them upon the dawn.