

2005 IATE Poetry and Prose Contest

Poems of Exceptional Merit

Kristin Idaszak, 12th grade
Lyons Township High School
La Grange, Illinois
Teacher, Glen Brown

Coming-of-Age

(after Billy Collins)

I watch the other kids study for standardized
tests that are the new rites of passage
now that Native American vision quests
and naming ceremonies have fallen out of style,

along with Roman sacrifices to Lares and Penates,
the minor gods of the household
and of adulthood. These tests are all we have left,
and we refer to them by odd nicknames,

terms of endearment, ACT, GED, MCAT.
They are the ones who in high school
were trendy, if not quite cool,
proving their worth by prettying on susceptible

teen-agers, weaklings intimidated into spending
their lunch money on review books
that cram the history of everything
into two hundred pages, so Henry VIII

accidentally sits on χ when cosine has a double
argument, and Carnegie ends up
next to *lascivious*, who seems pretentious,
like old money. The science reasoning graphs

keep bumping noses with
the analogies, which are impossible to live with.
There is a quiet girl skipping lunch again
to study in the back of her classroom

with the book on her lap,
dropping crumbs onto its pages.
If she were to pick an Indian name
for her coming-of-age, it would be Sixteen Hundred.