



# 20190620\_theslowdown\_20190620\_128

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

naomi, red rover, dodgeball, played, bodies, kids, float, sheep bleating, form, gaga, ball, perilously, game, wrecking balls, poem, ran, persuasive essays, hardball, graver, essay

00:06

I'm Tracy k Smith, and this is the slow down.

00:22

My daughter and her third grade classmates have written persuasive essays by stating their opinions and supporting them with facts. Naomi's essay seeks to persuade the reader that a form of dodgeball in which kids are corralled into a pen, called a Gaga pit should be banned on her school's campus. I remember dodgeball, a mob of kids played it in a big open field, where, statistically speaking, you had a better chance of being left alone than struck out with the ball. That's how we played soccer to another game in which I rarely made contact with a ball. But some boys played dodgeball in a shallow sliver of shade against a sunny wall. They fired mercilessly at their opponents who ran back and forth like cornered animals. As far as I gather from Naomi's essay, that's the spirit in which the game at her school is sometimes played. And she doesn't approve. On page two, Naomi offers this bit of evidence once it broke up a friendship because someone kicked the ball in their friend's face. And I made to recall all the many forms of danger that lurk near the surface of children's games, like crack the whip, where kids hold hands, forming a long human rope that's whipped back and forth, as the person at the end is flung perilously about, or hot peas and butter, a game that my friend, the poet Roger Reeves used to play when he was a kid. It too involved a group of kids spread out against a wall, though in this rendition, a small hardball rather than a large bouncy one was pitched at the frantic targets. I'm with Naomi, some of these games really hurt. Today's poem, Red Rover by Claire waman home puts me back on the playground at recess. It also allows part of my mind to linger in the present reality where other graver threats stock all of us, children included, and it makes me wish Naomi was right, that eradicating the Gaga pit was all it would take to keep us happy and safe. Read Red Rover, by Claire woman home. We are placed in a field. We are told to wield our bodies against

each other like wrecking balls or rockets to target the weakest links in the chain of other children's bodies. The surfaces of skin that sweat and Twitch without are willing it the millimeters of air between the poems that cannot be gripped into disappearance and shoot them down. rove to show signs of madness to shoot randomly to wander, to run someone through with a weapon. We pool our redness like wealth, until the final soldier is caught in the net of our hands. A limp bird, Red Rover, Red Rover. There are worlds whose waves do not break against the bodies of children. There are worlds of wide stagnant waters, Red Rover, Red Rover, send the boats of our bodies to float in those fields forever. Send wings for our arms unspooling between each other, like barricade tape, gauze for the crime scenes of our shadows. If we are unmentionable way our brokenness with long sleep, cast a spell over us like a sharp sheet. as ghosts, we float through each other, like soft sheep bleating. The slow down is a production of American Public Media, in partnership with the Poetry Foundation.