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# Teacher's Guide

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The Moth Presents

## All These Wonders

True Stories about Facing the Unknown

Edited by Catherine Burns

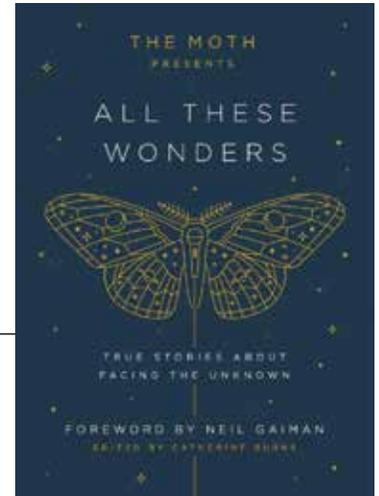
Foreword by Neil Gaiman

Curriculum by Micaela Blei  
and Catherine McCarthy

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Also available in e-book format

Reading Level: 8th Grade & Up



"A wonderful new book. . . . Some [stories] are heartbreakingly sad; some laugh-out-loud funny; some momentous and tragic; almost all of them resonant or surprising. They are stories that attest to the startling varieties and travails of human experience, and the shared threads of love, loss, fear and kindness that connect us. . . . The stories here . . . have translated seamlessly to the page. Though they are all relatively short . . . most possess a remarkable emotional depth and sincerity. . . . They are . . . closely focused, finely tuned narratives that have the force of an epiphany, while opening out to disclose the panoramic vistas of one person's life or the shockingly disparate worlds they have inhabited or traversed." —Michiko Kakutani, *New York Times*

### • about the book •

"Honesty matters. Vulnerability matters. Being open about who you were at a moment in time when you were in a difficult or an impossible place matters more than anything." —Neil Gaiman, from the foreword

From storytelling phenomenon The Moth, *All These Wonders* presents forty-five unforgettable true stories about risk, courage, and facing the unknown, drawn from the very best ever told on their stages. Carefully selected by the creative minds at The Moth, and adapted to the page to preserve the raw energy of live storytelling, these stories feature voices both familiar and new. Alongside public cultural figures like Tig Notaro and John Turturro, you will encounter: an astronomer gazing at the surface of Pluto for the first time, an Afghan refugee learning how much her father sacrificed to save their family, a hip-hop star coming to terms with being a "one-hit wonder," a young female spy risking everything as part of Churchill's "secret army" during World War II, and more.

High school students and neuroscientists alike, the storytellers share their ventures into uncharted territory—and how their lives were changed indelibly by what they discovered there.

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## • about The Moth

The Moth is an acclaimed not-for-profit organization dedicated to the art and craft of personal storytelling. In its twenty year history, The Moth has presented more than twenty thousand stories, told live and without notes, by people from all walks of life to standing-room-only crowds worldwide. The Moth Podcast is downloaded more than forty-four million times a year, and the Peabody Award-winning *The Moth Radio Hour* airs weekly on more than 450 public radio stations nationwide. Since 2012, The Moth has reached thousands of middle and high school students with its Education Program based in New York City. Eleven high school students from The Moth's Education Program have been featured on the radio hour and podcast. Catherine Burns is artistic director of The Moth and the editor of *The Moth: 50 True Stories*.

## • note to the teacher

Moth storytellers know how to hook us into their stories, drawing vivid images of lives outside our own. This collection of first person narratives can provide a new way for students to explore the lives of others and the ways we tell our own stories. Hearing and reading unfamiliar perspectives—in storytellers' own voices—can help develop empathy, personal reflection and other social emotional skills, in addition to literacy skills.

Because the stories in this book were first told live onstage, then transcribed and lightly edited, the language is fresh and immediate, and the brevity of the stories lends them to multiple readings and thoughtful comparisons with one another. The Moth allows an innovative path into a conversation about “writing voice” by taking storytellers' literal voices and putting them on the page.

Supporting the national Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in reading literature for high school curriculums, this collection is appropriate for grades 9-12. For simplicity, we've chosen to cite the standards for grades 11 and 12. At the college level, the book is appropriate for media studies, performance studies, composition, sociolinguistics and sociology classes, among others.

There are four sections in this guide:

Recommended Stories

Examining Content Using Common Core State Standards

Storytelling in the Classroom

Spotlight on Three Stories

**Recommended Stories:** To help guide you through the diverse offerings of this book, we've provided a few recommended lists to help shape your class's reading. The stories can stand alone or in themed collections and are each available in audio form on The Moth website (themoth.org), allowing for critical analysis of the stories as solo pieces or in comparison to one another and their audio performances.

**Examining Content Using Common Core State Standards:** The prompts and activities in this section provide for a critical analysis of *The Moth Presents All These Wonders* using the CCSS for Reading Literature for grades 11 and 12. They are organized according to the standard they primarily support.

For a complete listing of the Standards, go to: [www.corestandards.org/the-standards](http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards).

**Storytelling in the Classroom:** Here you will find prompts and guidelines for students to write or tell their own Moth stories, as well as principles for best practice when sharing stories in the

classroom. These activities connect to the Common Core State Standards for Writing for Grades 11 and 12. If you're interested in taking this work further with your students, you can become a Curriculum Partner with The Moth—giving you access to resources and exclusive content: [themoth.org/education/resources](http://themoth.org/education/resources).

**Spotlight on Three Stories:** In this section, you'll find a more in-depth examination of three noteworthy stories in the book—"Prom," "Downstairs Neighbors," and "The Price of Freedom." In addition, at the end of each story section, a classroom activity is provided to engage students in new ways with both the text and with reflection on their own lives.

## → recommended stories for high school readers

Almost all of the stories in *All These Wonders* are appropriate for high school, with a few exceptions. The stories below are particularly relevant for high school audiences. The stories in the book are loosely organized along thematic lines, and these lists are also organized on themes to make it easier to read a series of Moth stories together as part of a unit.

Depending on the structure of your class, you may also wish to provide students with a list of their own and ask them to choose stories to read independently or in small groups. Links to the audio recordings of these stories are available in the Resources section at the end of this guide.

### list #1: coming of age

These are stories of young protagonists or adults reflecting on the young people in their lives. They are about life in transition: taking risks, exploring identity and beginning to understand one's place in the world.

#### "The Moon and Stars Talks" by Tara Clancy: p. 3

Tara grows up in working class Queens with no real vision of life beyond her borough. When Tara is a teenager, her mom begins dating a wealthy man—and suddenly Tara is spending weekends at his fancy house in the Hamptons, where he introduces her to another world of thinking and new possibilities for who she could become.

*Content warning: mentions smoking blunts, drinking 40s in high school*

#### "Jenny" by Samuel James: p. 112

Samuel is an African American teenager who feels abandoned and angry as he's bounced around the Maine foster care system. His friendship with Jenny, a girl who rides the school bus with him, changes everything.

#### "R2 Where Are You?" by Tig Notaro: p. 140

Tig, a well-known stand up comedian, tells of her tumultuous relationship with her stepfather Rick, who ran their household with robotic detachment and always disapproved of her comedic aspirations. When tragedy strikes, she begins to see a different side of Rick.

#### "My Grandfather's Shoes" by Christian Garland: p. 222

Christian, a high school student from The Moth Education Program, steals money from his grandfather to buy sneakers. Years later, he decides to pay his grandfather back and regain his trust before it's too late.

*Content warning: grandfather makes a joke: "Did you get somebody pregnant?"*

#### "Leaping Forward" by Cybele Abbett: p. 226

Cybele's preteen daughter comes out as transgender, and Cybele has to navigate her own conflicting feelings as her child transitions.

*Content warning: mention of her breasts and what they mean to her as a lover, mother and woman*

**“Prom” by Hasan Minhaj: p. 233**

Hasan, now a stand-up comedian and correspondent on *The Daily Show*, grew up Indian American in a largely white California community. He describes the sometimes funny, sometimes excruciating ways he experienced this culture clash.

**“Unusual Normality” by Ishmael Beah: p. 9**

Ishmael adjusts to life in America after being a child soldier in Sierra Leone. In a darkly funny and touching story that centers around a game of paintball, he describes how he kept the secret of his past from his new high school friends in an attempt to experience the innocence of childhood that he never got to have.

*Content warning: oblique references to violence and the loss of his family in the war*

**list #2: it’s all relative**

**There’s the family you choose and the family you’re stuck with, for better or worse . . .**

These are stories about the complications of relationships: big loves, tough choices, balancing acts and moments of transformation.

**“The Two Times I Met Lawrence Fishburne” by Chenjerai Kumanyika: p. 59**

Chenjerai is overjoyed when his hip-hop group hits it big and assumes that his star will continue to rise. When their success fizzles out, he has to come to terms with being a “one hit wonder” and what he will do with his life after his fifteen minutes of fame.

*Content warning: strong language*

**“Deja Vu (Again)” by Cole Kazdin: p. 118**

Cole suffers from amnesia after hitting her head in an onscreen stunt. She struggles to relearn who she is, and to avoid repeating the relationship mistakes she can’t remember making.

*Content: strong language*

**“Stumbling in the Dark” by John Turturro: p. 195**

In this funny and touching story, John, a well-known actor, struggles to balance all the responsibilities of adulthood: to his mother, his mentally ill brother, his own career and life—all during the 2003 New York City blackout.

**“Downstairs Neighbors” by Shannon Cason: p. 209**

A new family moves in below Shannon and his family in Chicago. When he realizes that his new neighbor Jesse is involved in dealing drugs, Shannon is torn about whether he should call the police.

*Content warning: references to drugs, alcohol*

**“Modern Family” by Sara Barron: p. 132**

When Sara meets the man she will eventually marry, there’s one relationship hiccup: he shares custody of a dog with his ex-girlfriend. Sara hilariously brings us into her crisis as she tries to be open-minded to modern romance but finds herself driven crazy by the ex-girlfriend’s active presence in their lives.

*Content warning: references nudity.*

**“Kidneys and Commitments” by Gil Reyes: p. 305**

When Gil came out to his parents as gay, they told him they never wanted to meet anyone he was dating. But when Gil’s kidney unexpectedly fails and he’s in need of a kidney donor, only his boyfriend can save his life—and his relationship with his family.

**“Light and Hope” by Bethany Van Delft: p. 297**

When Bethany discovers that her daughter has Down Syndrome, she has to come to terms with expectations versus reality. With real honesty, Bethany lets us into her struggles of motherhood—and ultimately her discovery of the funny, strong daughter that she has.

**list #3: eyewitness to history**

These are stories of real people whose lives have intersected with historical and current events. Reading personal accounts can be a compelling way to connect human lives to history and to remind students that they, too, are living history every day.

**“Fog of Disbelief” by Carl Pilliteri: p. 51**

Carl was working in the Fukushima nuclear power plant when the 2011 tsunami hit Japan. He describes the day’s events with action-packed drama and palpable fear. When he escapes to safety, he tries to no avail to find the woman who always made him feel at home in Japan: the owner of his favorite restaurant, whom he lovingly called the “chicken lady.”

*Content warning: strong language*

**“Call Me Charlie” by Josh Bond: p. 125**

Josh manages an apartment building in Los Angeles and gets along well with his older neighbor/tenant, Charlie. One day in 2011, the FBI knocks on Josh’s door and informs him that “Charlie” is in fact Whitey Bulger, infamous mob boss and America’s most wanted criminal. Josh has a tough choice to make—a choice that makes history.

**“The Shower” by Tomi Reichental: p. 149**

When Tomi was nine years old in 1944, his family was taken to Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Germany. He describes the day when he and his mother are rounded up and taken to the showers. He can’t understand why the adults seem so anxious about taking a shower, but he senses the fear and describes with heartbreaking vividness their moments of suspense and anxiety.

**“A New Home” by Dori Samadzai-Bonner: p. 174**

In the early 1990s, Dori’s family fled Afghanistan and sought asylum in the United States. One day, after years of waiting for approval over their visas, they are summoned to court, where the judge tells them that they must return to Afghanistan, and where her father goes to desperate lengths to keep them safe.

**“Undercover in North Korea with Its Future Leaders” by Suki Kim: p. 215**

Suki Kim is the only person who has successfully entered North Korea as an undercover reporter. She tells the story of teaching in a university for the country’s elite in 2011—witnessing the culture of fear and lies that pervades the lives of even her young students.

**“The Price of Freedom” by Noreen Riols: p. 275**

During World War II, Noreen was recruited into Churchill’s Secret Army of spies at just eighteen years old. Her job was to train the young men who would be infiltrating enemy territories—including one with whom she fell deeply in love.

**“On Approach to Pluto” by Cathy Olkin: p. 310**

In 2004, Cathy had worked for a decade on NASA’s New Horizons mission to photograph the surface of Pluto. Just as the New Horizon is set to orbit Pluto to complete its mission, the primary computer crashes. Cathy and her team must fight to see the fruits of her decade of work: all the wonders of a planet whose surface had never been seen before.

## examining content using common core standards

**STANDARD: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas**

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.7**

**Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text.**

### classroom activity: comparing spoken (audio) and written stories

After reading a story, listen to the audio on The Moth website (you can find links in Resources, below).

As a class, compare the effect of the audio to the written story. What changes did the editor make? What surprises you about hearing the voice of the storyteller—and how does it change your experience of the story?

What details have a different impact as spoken than as read? Why do you think that is?

**STANDARDS: Craft and Structure**

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4**

**Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)**

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5**

**Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.**

### classroom activity: talking about the craft of storytelling

Any of the stories in *All These Wonders* can allow for an exploration of storyteller craft. You might put students in reading circles with different stories or have them choose stories for homework and bring in responses.

When Moth storytellers practice and refine their stories, three key concepts within the Moth artistic process are:

**STAKES:** stories are most compelling when the storyteller lets the audience know what was at stake for them in the story. When the audience/reader knows what matters to the storyteller—what they have to win or lose within the story—they are all the more invested in the story.

**CHANGE:** Moth stories almost always involve a personal transformation to the protagonist/storyteller. Somehow, the storyteller is different from the beginning of the story to the end.

**THEME:** a single story from one's life can be told in many different ways; storytellers tend to draw out one principal theme within the story to give it shape and to create a story arc.

Pick any one or two stories and have students identify the key elements of STAKES, CHANGE and THEME. Where do you see evidence in the text of these crafting strategies? Choose one or two details for each. How do they affect your own reading and/or listening experience?

Why do you think a storyteller chose to BEGIN and END their story the way they did? What questions remain?

## → storytelling in the classroom

### **WRITING STANDARDS: Text Types and Purposes**

#### **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3**

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

#### **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.A**

Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.

#### **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.B**

Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

#### **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.C**

Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole and build toward a particular tone and outcome (e.g., a sense of mystery, suspense, growth, or resolution).

#### **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.D**

Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

#### **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.E**

Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

### **if you want students to tell stories**

Here are a few things to keep in mind that we've found important when working with young people and personal narrative performance. You can request further curriculum resources for your classroom here: [themoth.org/education/resources](http://themoth.org/education/resources).

#### **Set up a supportive space for sharing stories**

Take the time to talk about boundaries, supportive listening and the right for students to decide their own stories. In the same vein, we recommend setting some boundaries for types of stories that are off-limits, including stories that might negatively affect other members of the community and stories that are too raw/sensitive for students to be working on for the purposes of art-making.

#### **Storytelling is a social art: talk it out!**

After taking some time to brainstorm story ideas with the prompts below, have students share these ideas in pairs or table groups. A project could end with students sharing stories out loud or by transcribing stories into written pieces.

#### **Offer multiple ways for students to be successful**

Many teachers like to end a Moth Unit with a story performance of some kind, but if a student isn't ready to share their story with the whole class, we recommend allowing them to tell it to you privately or with a small audience of their choosing. Telling a story out loud in any form is a bold act!

#### **Use storytelling as a tool for community-building**

Storytelling is just as much about listening as it is about sharing. We recommend including supportive listening and positive contributions to the community as a part of the assessment rubric for a storytelling assignment.

## prompt:

Tell or write a Moth-style story of your own inspired by some of these prompts:

A time you did something you never thought you'd do:

A time your relationship with someone you love changed—a little or a lot:

A time that you took a risk—or decided NOT to take the risk:

A time you tried to be something you weren't:

## → spotlight on three stories

### STANDARDS: Key Ideas and Details

#### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2

**Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.**

#### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3

**Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).**

### “Prom” by Hasan Minhaj

Hasan explores the idea of being a “fish out of water” throughout the story. What scenes or details support this theme?

Hasan uses humor to tell a story that ultimately has serious undertones. Identify a few places where he uses humor to support the overall theme of his story and a few places where he shifts the tone to more serious reflection. How might humor help the reader relate to his (ultimately serious) story?

#### Writing or storytelling prompt:

Can you remember a time you felt like a fish out of water? What was it about the situation or your environment that made you feel out of place? How did you handle it? (To try: ask students in pairs to describe one scene from their story. Give us vivid detail about the situation and what you were thinking/feeling inside of it.)

### “Downstairs Neighbors” by Shannon Cason

Identify the moments where Shannon grapples with a decision. How does he take the reader into his inner conflict? How does he show the reader what hangs in the balance of his decisions?

Shannon leaves the story somewhat unresolved at the end—he doesn't tie it up in a neat bow. Why do you think he does this?

#### Writing or storytelling prompt:

What would you have done in Shannon's shoes? Why? Discuss as a class or with a partner, or write a short essay about your take.

Write about a time you had to make a tough decision. What were the stakes of your decision (what did you have to win or lose)?

## “The Price of Freedom” by Noreen Riols

Have students research Churchill’s “secret army” and the role they played in WWII. Can you find any accounts of the role women played?

How does Noreen change during the course of the story? How does she describe who she was at the beginning of the story and who she has become at the end? How does Noreen illustrate this personal transformation through the details of her story?

### Writing or storytelling prompt:

TELLING STORIES FROM HISTORY: Have students research the “secret army” and choose one person who was involved. Write (and/or perform!) a Moth-style story from the perspective of this person in history.

(You may want to decide as a class on some essential elements of a Moth Story before assigning this activity.)

Noreen describes how her experience in the secret army forced her to grow up in the span of just a few years. Have you ever had to fill shoes or take on a responsibility that you didn’t know if you were ready for? How did you do it? Describe who you were at the beginning of the experience and how you changed, using Moth strategies like scene and detail.

## resources

Here is a list of links to audio versions of the stories in our “recommended” list.

### list #1: coming of age

“The Moon and Stars Talks” by Tara Clancy: p. 3  
[themoth.org/stories/the-moon-and-stars-talks](http://themoth.org/stories/the-moon-and-stars-talks)

“Jenny” by Samuel James: p. 112  
[themoth.org/stories/jenny](http://themoth.org/stories/jenny)

“R2 Where Are You?” by Tig Notaro: p. 140  
[themoth.org/stories/r2-where-are-you](http://themoth.org/stories/r2-where-are-you)

“My Grandfather’s Shoes” by Christian Garland: p. 222  
[themoth.org/stories/my-grandfathers-shoes](http://themoth.org/stories/my-grandfathers-shoes)

“Leaping Forward” by Cybele Abbett: p. 226  
[themoth.org/stories/leaping-forward](http://themoth.org/stories/leaping-forward)

“Prom” by Hasan Minhaj: p. 233  
[themoth.org/stories/prom](http://themoth.org/stories/prom)

“Unusual Normality” by Ishmael Beah: p. 9  
[themoth.org/stories/unusual-normality](http://themoth.org/stories/unusual-normality)

### list #2: it’s all relative

“The Two Times I Met Lawrence Fishburne” by Chenjerai Kumanyika: p. 59  
[themoth.org/stories/the-two-times-i-met-laurence-fishburne](http://themoth.org/stories/the-two-times-i-met-laurence-fishburne)

“Deja Vu (Again)” by Cole Kazdin: p. 118  
[themoth.org/stories/deja-vu-again](http://themoth.org/stories/deja-vu-again)

“Stumbling in the Dark” by John Turturro: p. 195  
[themoth.org/stories/stumbling-in-the-dark](http://themoth.org/stories/stumbling-in-the-dark)

“Downstairs Neighbors” by Shannon Cason: p. 209  
[themoth.org/stories/downstairs-neighbors](http://themoth.org/stories/downstairs-neighbors)

“Modern Family” by Sara Barron: p. 132  
[themoth.org/stories/modern-family](http://themoth.org/stories/modern-family)

“Kidneys and Commitments” by Gil Reyes: p. 305  
[themoth.org/stories/kidneys-and-commitments](http://themoth.org/stories/kidneys-and-commitments)

“Light and Hope” by Bethany Van Delft: p. 297  
[themoth.org/stories/light-and-hope](http://themoth.org/stories/light-and-hope)

### list #3: eyewitness to history

“Fog of Disbelief” by Carl Pilliteri: p. 51  
[themoth.org/stories/fog-of-disbelief](http://themoth.org/stories/fog-of-disbelief)

“Call Me Charlie” by Josh Bond: p. 125  
[themoth.org/stories/call-me-charlie](http://themoth.org/stories/call-me-charlie)

“The Shower” by Tomi Reichental: p. 149  
[themoth.org/stories/the-shower](http://themoth.org/stories/the-shower)

“A New Home” by Dori Samadzai-Bonner: p. 174  
[themoth.org/stories/a-new-home](http://themoth.org/stories/a-new-home)

“Undercover in North Korea with Its Future Leaders” by Suki Kim: p. 215  
[themoth.org/stories/undercover-in-north-korea-with-its-future-leaders](http://themoth.org/stories/undercover-in-north-korea-with-its-future-leaders)

“The Price of Freedom” by Noreen Riols: p. 275  
[themoth.org/stories/the-spy-who-loved-me](http://themoth.org/stories/the-spy-who-loved-me)

“On Approach to Pluto” by Cathy Olkin: p. 310  
This story is not available in audio. Apologies!

You can request further curriculum resources for your classroom here:  
[themoth.org/education/resources](http://themoth.org/education/resources).

## — about this guide’s writers

MICAELA BLEI is a storyteller, Ph.D. candidate in Education and Senior Education Program Manager for The Moth. Micaela co-founded and designed The Moth High School StorySLAM Program with Catherine McCarthy. She has given keynotes and professional development workshops at Lincoln Center Education, Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, SXSWedu and many others. Micaela is a two-time Moth GrandSLAM champion and the writer/performer of the solo storytelling show “The Secret Life of Your Third Grade Teacher.” You can hear her on *The Moth Radio Hour* and see more of her at [michaelablei.com](http://michaelablei.com).

CATHERINE McCARTHY is a director on the Moth Mainstage, a former producer of Moth StorySLAM and Mainstage events and Education Program Manager for The Moth. Catherine co-founded and designed The Moth High School StorySLAM Program with Micaela Blei and directs The Moth Education Program’s GrandSLAMs and other public performances. You can hear Catherine’s stories on *The Moth Radio Hour*. She is currently pursuing a Master’s degree in Social Work at Fordham University.

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