

# ***Breaking the Block***

**Elizabeth Pearson**

Washington High School, Jefferson County

Teacher: Ann Gentile

West Virginia State Winner

First Place, Grades 11-12

*“Come on brain, think of things*

*Come on brain, think of things*

*Come on brain, be so smart...”*

—Lin-Manuel Miranda

Leah was, for lack of a better term, in a slump. (She liked the word slump—for some reason it made her think of melting snow and lumps of sugar, so she put it on her mental list of BEST WORDS in between *malarkey* and *guru*.) She stared at the computer screen, and the depressingly blank Word document stared back at her. “I know what you’re doing,” she told it, narrowing her eyes. “And I’m not going to let you beat me—you stupid, disgusting—” She swore at it for a while, before finishing with a venomous, “...*writer’s block*.”

Ah, writer’s block! The bane of authors everywhere. It made Leah want to cry and shout and generously stuff her face with chocolate and ice cream and occasionally chocolate ice cream, if she was feeling particularly frustrated. The beginning of a novel was always the worst, because she could never decide how she wanted to start it. (That made it sound like she’d actually finished a novel, but in reality, she’d never gotten past the half-way point of writing a manuscript because she’d lose the will to write or get an even better idea...that she would never really finish.)

“Come on come on come on...” She groaned, pulling at her hair. Maybe if she begged her brain enough, it would take pity on her and give her an idea. Before that useless sack of meat and nerves could give her anything useful, her alarm rang, and she sighed. It was time to get back to real life.

The starving artist stereotype was not quite Leah’s style, as she preferred to eat three meals a day with a generous helping of snacks and junk food in between, and that required money. As did Wi-Fi,

electricity, water, and other essential things for life that a functioning adult (did she count as one?) required. So by day, the infamous (and unpublished, but she didn't want to think about that) L. K Morgan worked as...secretary Leah Tse. Her company didn't even have the decency to be as entertaining as Dunder Mifflin, or to have a super-secret government agency using them as a cover, so she sorted through paperwork and organized meetings and other things that children wanted to avoid doing for a career. But it paid the bills, and it was only a fifteen-minute walk from her apartment, so that was a plus.

Leah shrugged on her coat and slipped on her shoes before briskly walking out the door, Chanel handbag swinging on the crook of her elbow. She wasn't nearly rich enough to own a designer purse, but she found it in a bin at a thrift store and it made her feel fancy, so she bought it. Plus, she liked the word Chanel. It was on her ever-growing BEST WORDS LIST, which she would look at whenever she couldn't get past her writer's block and needed to fish for ideas. *Fandango, epiphany, bemused...*

She passed the bakery that made the *best* blueberry bagels and cannoli, and she could smell the delightful scent of freshly baked goods wafting out the door. Cannoli was another great word...maybe she could write about a bakery that sold souls instead of pastries, or maybe the food could be made of crushed dreams or something equally morbid. She toyed with the idea for a moment, before tossing it into mental storage when she saw the laundromat. She was not overly fond of the word laundromat, but the smudged windows and roaring washing machines made her think of a superhero's alter ego (and there was another awesome word—*alter ego*. Even if said word was technically two. She would put it in between *interloper* and *panache*).

Maybe she could write about a superhero who worked out of a laundromat to defeat the evil bakers who made doughnuts out of lost souls and muffins out of crushed dreams. She was kind of tired of watching movies where the superhero was obscenely rich, so she could write about a hero that struggled to make ends meet and wondered if they would be evicted because they weren't making much cash on account of their superhero shenanigans—yeah, she liked that idea. She liked it a lot.

She walked into the lobby, smiling at the receptionist and making the necessary pleasantries that society defined as polite, but the idea of her dirt-poor hero dogged her steps to her desk and around the office for the rest of the day.

*Her name is Avery*, she thought as she sorted through paperwork, her mind wandering through clouds of ideas and wading through waters of inspiration. *Avery...last name something Polish, but not Kowalski. She's totally from a Polish family, they came across the pond during or after World War Two. She grew up in a nice-ish neighborhood, but she wasn't very good at school, (even though she's smart) so she never went to college and ended up running a laundromat...*

On her break she looked up lists of Polish names—Bosko, Filipek, Ryba...Sadowski. She liked the sound of Sadowski, and apparently it meant garden or orchard in Polish. Avery Sadowski had a nice ring to it.

Leah wondered if Avery Sadowski kept a list of words in her head to ponder on and roll on her tongue to see if she enjoyed the taste of them. Was she dramatic? Did she understate things? What thoughts raced in her mind—or did her thoughts crawl, or fly, or swim? If she did have a list, what would her words be? *Uncanny, duality, plebian, smirk...*

Such thoughts filled her mind as she walked home, hands shoved in her pockets to protect them from the evening chill. *Avery Sadowski*, Leah thought with relish. A superhero who dressed in worn-out camouflage and a ski mask because spandex was stupid, and Kevlar was expensive. One who went to her son's track meets and stressed over making ends meet and keeping the streets safe and her business running and kicking the butts of evil bakers that dealt in stolen souls and broken dreams...

*Avery Sadowski never thought she'd amount to much*, Leah typed when she got home, finally ridding the computer of its depressing blankness. Words swirled in her head, and she thanked her brain or whatever ghost that whispered inspiration in her ear for thinking of something to break the block.