

Ed Bok Lee / POLYPHONICA

I know children who must
translate their parents' words

into help from others.
These ancient instruments

in sneakers and band-aids,
who smell like the wind

beneath cotton and flannel Goodwill.
Who never possess time

to savor the stories they tell,
the power winding sideways

like a clock that can't fly
to a store clerk,

bus driver, social worker,
911 operator, perplexed

neighbor. Messages immigrant
as birds, fish and grass

swoop in unison to
and away from any

classroom sentence pattern.
Sometimes they shut down.

As adults grow frustrated,
threaten, sigh; two languages

choked mid-air, canceling
the third's strange

music no dictionary
could document

a fly's eye.