

Background: Sabyne “Free” Pierre is an organizer, law student, and poet at heart. free uses art to process their personal experiences to advocate for legal, systemic changes. In their poem, “we been knew the cops”, they interact with a younger version of themselves, who still exists somewhere and grapples with the lasting effects of police presence in their elementary and middle school in Irvington, NJ.

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**We been knew the cops**

so tyreke was mad again and  
the principal let him be handcuffed and  
sit inside the cop car to  
see what it was like. and nobody  
said nothing  
he cried  
we laughed  
we was all red and loud

and felix was a big boy  
but that lunch period you’d a  
mistaken boy for bird  
kid for kite  
for threat  
something you let go of and forget  
then BOOM  
BOOM  
he came down and that year we  
found out a body slam get you a transfer to the High school

me, I never said nothing  
I slid through metal detectors with rocks  
on my tongue and pebbles cascading through my ribcage

what if there was a wrong way to say good morning?