Seat of the Muses:
An Unexpected Collaboration







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myo͞oz

The noun muse, which in lowercase refers to a source of inspiration and when capitalized to one of the sister goddesses of Greek mythology., comes from the Greek Mousa. The ultimate Greek origin of the word museum translates as "of the Muses."

- https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/muse





A Chance Meeting

Community Partners

Accreditation seeks to ensure constituents and the public that the quality and integrity of higher educational institutions meet acceptable levels of quality. These outcomes are achieved through rigorous internal and external peer review processes during which the institution is evaluated against a common set of standards.

You promised what?

How do creative writers and historians
work together to create a new experience?

What was the goal for Southeastern?

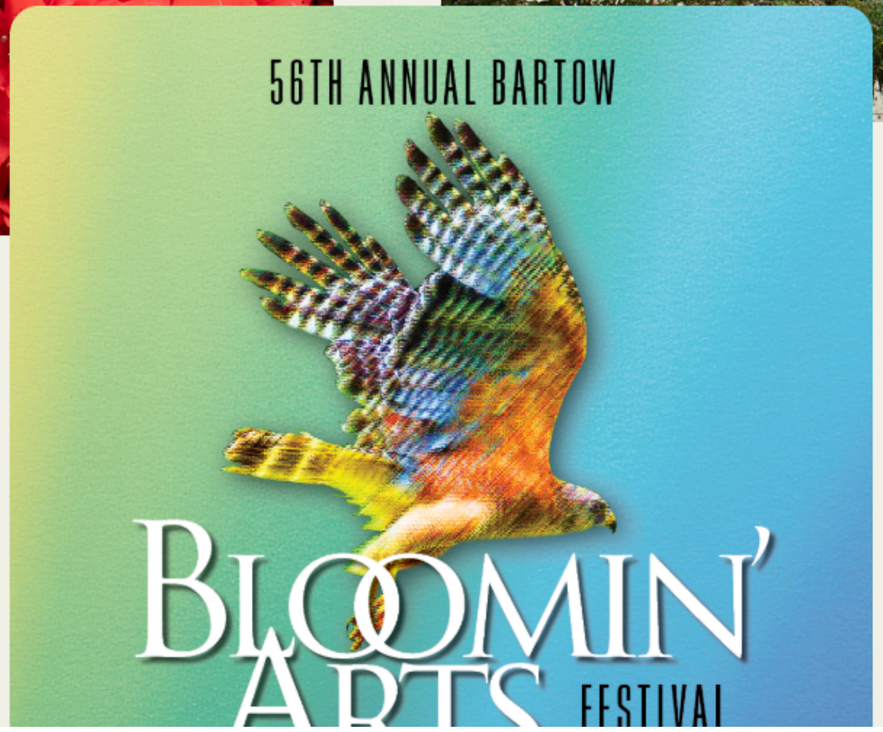
Create additional pathways for student success

What needs did the History Center have?

Connect with new audiences and collaborate with community events







Visit CENTRAL FLORIDA

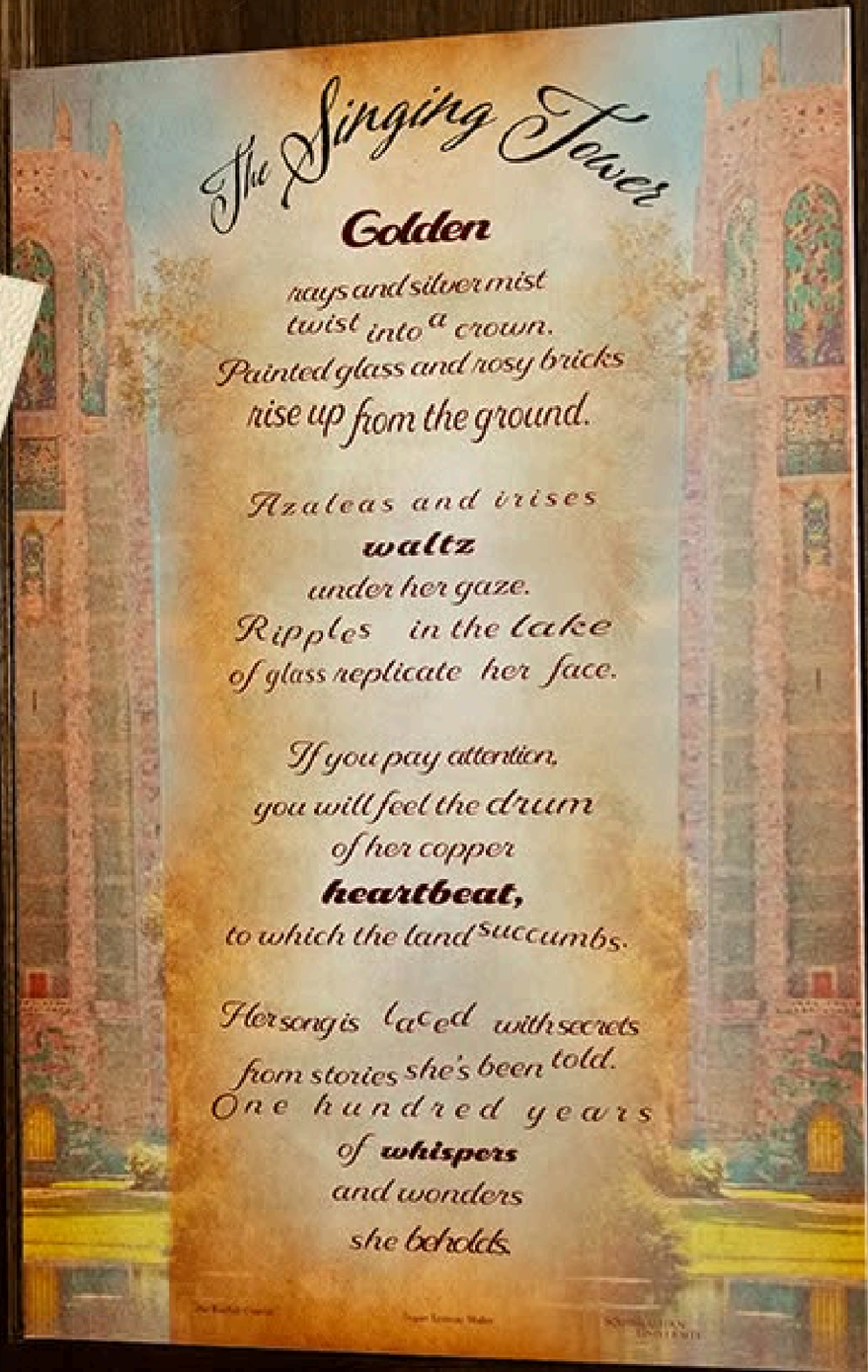
The 56th Annual

Bloomin' Arts Festival

POLK COUNTY HISTORY CENTER

Festival of Writing

in partnership with Southeastern University



The Festival of Wrting

University Goals

- **Produce original work from guided prompts.**
  - Students will use prompted content drawn from the Polk County History Center's collections to write entirely unique pieces responding to the objects and themes on display.
- **Write for a real audience.**
  - Students will compose work intended for public exhibition rather than classroom assessment alone.
- **Meet professional deadlines.**
- **Collaborate across disciplines.**
  - Students will work at the intersection of the history and language arts curricula, integrating research and interpretation with creative composition.
- **Extend authorship into visual form.**
  - Students will have the opportunity to design the graphic elements that accompany their writing, giving them ownership of both the text and its presentation.
- **Earn public exhibition.**
  - Students who successfully complete the assignment will have their writing displayed in the gallery that inspired it.

The Festival of Wrting

History Center Goals

- **Introduce diverse perspectives into object narratives.**
  - The Center will expand and enrich its interpretive voice by incorporating student-authored responses into gallery curation.
- **Strengthen the university partnership.**
  - The Center will broaden an ongoing collaborative relationship with Southeastern University that supports student learning and community engagement.
- **Connect to the broader arts community.**
  - The Center will align the Festival of Writing with the Annual Bartow Bloomin' Arts Festival, situating literary work within a larger celebration of fine arts.


Polk
ARTs
Art in the of Florida
2026 Festival of Writing



My Alafia

After Ed Fortner's Memories of Bone Valley
An Ekphrasis by Kylie Weatherholt

Dawn peeks her head through the trunks of the trees.
Silence, save the chipper tune of a grey Osprey.
Humidity mingles with a slight breeze, caught in a secret dance of daybreak.

My serene Alafia.

A piercing cry from a Limpkin and the world springs into action.
Rustling whispers of leaves crescendo, harmonizing the humming of mosquitos.
Orange and pink speckle the clouds, reflected by the Alafia's smooth surface.

My stirring Alafia.

Spritely and swift, the gurgling river greets the soggy shore.
A lazy lizard lounges above on a prickly palm branch, flaunting his colorful dewlap.
Below the surface, an eruption of bubbles burst from a mixed school of bluegill and bass.

My playful Alafia.



Flora and fauna alike pause, puzzled by an approaching ruckus.
A streak of red and silver, weighed down by a man and boy steadily draws nearer.
The crispy grass crunches beneath the bicycle's rugged tires.

My welcoming Alafia.

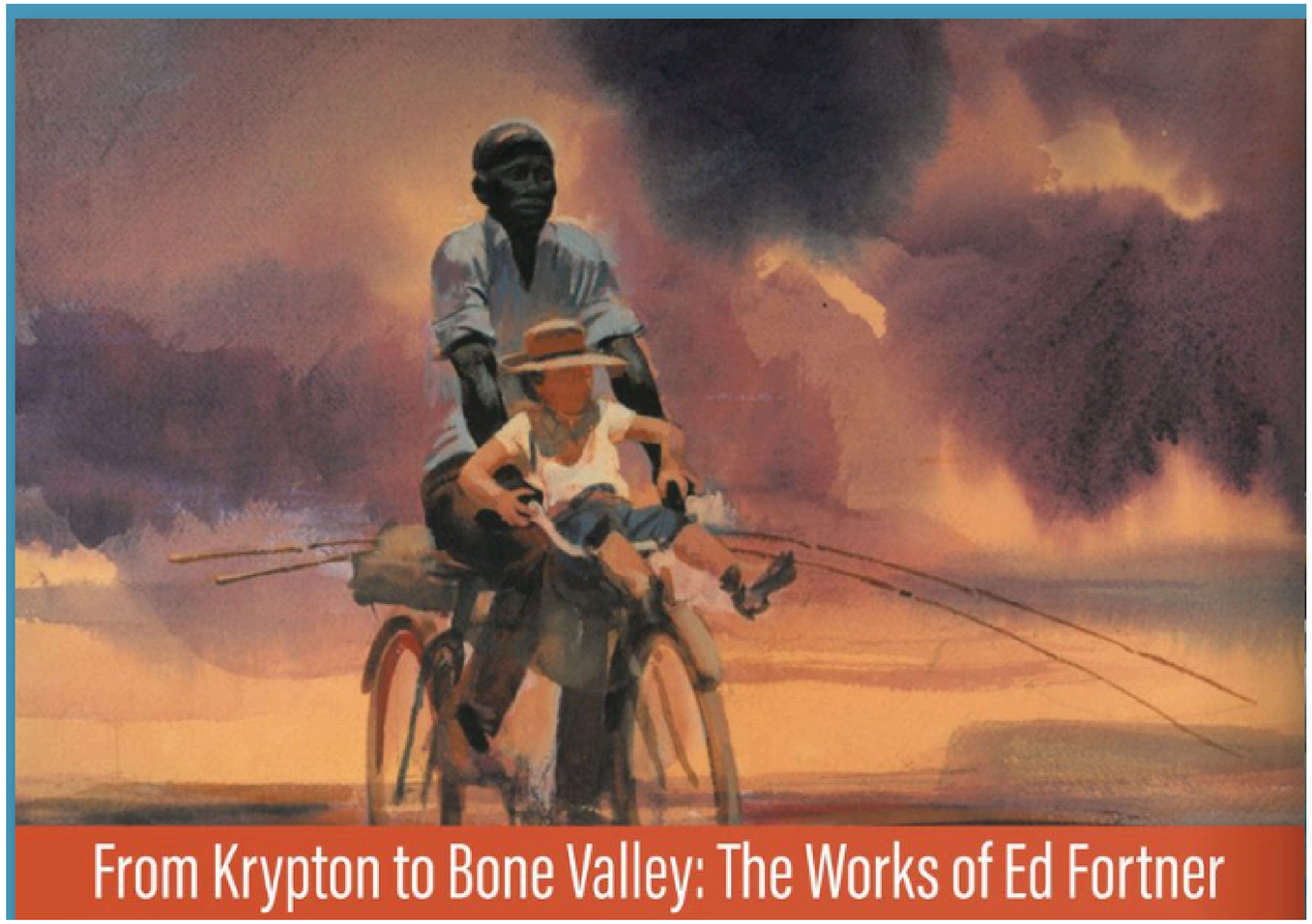
The two figures approach the bank, fishing poles striking pails in harmony with their hums.
Giggling with glee, the child hurries ahead and buries his toes in the cool mud.
Together they observe, entranced for hours, admiring and reflecting, never bored.

My captivating Alafia.

Forever engrained, this sunrise remains,
In my heart, my home you will always be.
My Alafia in a time gone by.

Poetry by Kylie Weatherholt

SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY
Poetic Typography
Spring 2025
Visual Design Professor: Saied Farisi
Creative Wrting Professor: Amanda Forrester
Designer: Sydney Lee
Poet: Kylie Weatherholt



That Which:

THE SOUL LIVES BY

after **Polk County**, a play by Zora Neale Hurston,
Polk County History Center's **Arts & Culture**

There is an *emphasis* on brutality that undermines the song and dance of someone who lives to keep living. And there is an oppression that demands rightful recognition, cobblestones on a hill too steep to be paved. The two intertwine to form a tapestry. We suffer but we are bright despite what is lodged in our throats.

A woman leaned against a tree stump, careful so as to not snag her sunny yellow skirt on the rough chopped splinters. Hot Florida sun beat down and radiated off her dark skin, and sweat ran in itchy rivers down her back. **Zora Neale Hurston** grew up in northern Florida, from which a haze of humidity still called her.

In the distance was a lumber camp, with a steady drudge of movement. Out of sight were the sounds of the harvest: axes hacking, metal cleaving through wood, the groaning of a tree not quite ready to surrender and fall.

Hurston pushed herself up from her perch and climbed back into her car. She rolled into the camp slowly, trying to temper her curiosity. She was here for their stories, songs, and struggles. The people did nothing to mask their hostile stares, so she kept her eyes straight ahead; anything to keep them from disappearing entirely behind their guard.

"What's a pretty lil' thing like you'n doin' here?"

The voice came from out her window, from a hearty woman with a dazzling smile. They talked for a minute, exchanging few pleasantries before honing in on interrogation.

The woman's name was Babe Hill. Hurston updated her on the nature of her arrival, and Babe Hill looked her over with the sharp eye of an osprey, shook her head, and a warm chuckle tumbled from her mouth. She motioned for Hurston to park and step out. She could **"give a grand ol' tour."**

Babe Hill pointed out who done what as they walked. ***Fugitive, gambler, laborer, hardworking wife, an armed-and-ready gal like herself.*** Why, she'd killed her husband on Christmas Day just last year. And of course, vagrants were a good fraction of the population, Babe Hill laughed, harshly this time. It was a crime, at the end of the day, to be both African American and stand still. Work was the only option. Movement was the only option. And rest was a dream forever tugged out of reach.

Hurston had known a few men convicted like that back home; men who'd stood a minute too long outside a white man's business. Once the lumber company got their claws in the men's bail, they were obliged to report to the company's camp. But there was still life in them, even after the mill had all but bought them. ***And yet, among them all, murderers and wives and vagrants, was an immutable vibrancy.***

Hurston embedded herself in the camp, gathering tales and forging connections. So many stories came to the surface, she could have scooped them up with a fishing net. A spunky woman who went by **Big Sweet** took her under her wing, and she became ingrained in the camp life, trusted by many, but not all. Another woman, Lucy, took upon herself a mantle of jealousy, convinced that Hurston was sweet on her man.

After many weeks, Zora Neale Hurston stood at knifepoint, frozen amidst the flurry of shouts. The strong shoulders of Big Sweet pushed past her, standing in the way of Lucy, her attacker. Hurston was pushed suddenly, and briefly caught a glimpse of a friendly face as a man hollered for her to leave. ***She left the lumber camp that day, but took their stories with her—etched into memory, carved into bone. They would live on, enshrined in paper, brought to life on stage.***







SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY | Poetic Typography Spring 2025 | *Visual Design Professor:* Saied Farisi *Creative Writing Professor:* Amanda Forrester | *Designer:* Sarah Smith *Author:* Sarah Smith

-Dear Daddy-

by Izzy Gonzalez

Untidy letters slant forward
like soldiers taking a knee.
A waxy dot of dull,
red crayon pierces through
the sentences like
a bullet hole
... come home soon...

a tiny hand pauses,
plucking up distant memories
of wrestling with a larger, rougher hand,
or grasping a flying football.
...so you can play with me.

The rainy smell of new card
stock
grows stale, pages turn
yellow and soggy
and curl at the corners
by the time hugs and kisses
reach dearest daddy,
who dresses like a calico cat
in brown and green
on a dusty street.
In a foreign world

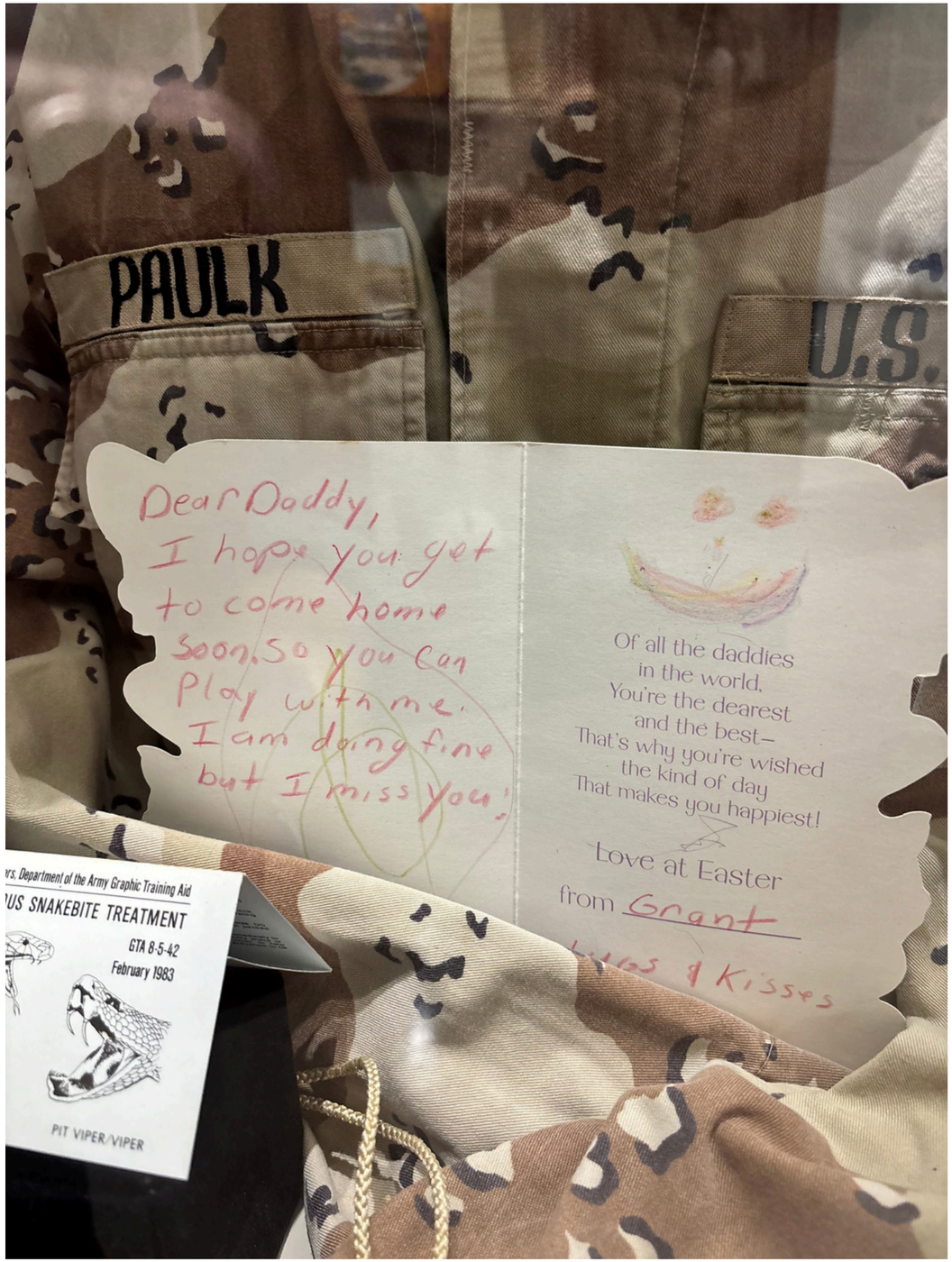
Daddy laughs at the letters,
spelled to perfection this time.
A crayoned smile winks at him
at the top of the page,
scrawled out in rainbow colors.
Frustrated threads of green scribbles
flow
through a child's most honest words:

-I am doing fine
but I miss you.-

Poet: Izzy Gonzalez

SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

Designer: Noah Hickey



LABELS

WE LABEL PEOPLE LIKE
CITRUS CRATES
WE ASSUME FROM APPEARANCE WHAT WILL BE THEIR TRAITS
A BLACK KINGFISHER
LABEL MAY NOT APPEAL TO US
LIKE HOW PEOPLE JUDGE BY LOOKS WHO THEY CAN TRUST
A YELLOW HILL TOP LABEL CONTAINS UGLY PEELS THAT HIDE
THE TRUE DELICIOUSNESS AND VALUE OF THE FRUIT INSIDE
SOME WILL NEVER SEE THE VALUE OF PEOPLE WHO ARE SCARRED
THEY ONLY SEE THEIR FLAWS, AND LOOKING PAST THEM IS HARD
ARIANA FLOREX READS THE RED LABEL,
WHICH BOTH INSIDE AND OUT
IS REALLY NOTHING SPECIAL,
NOTHING TO WRITE HOME ABOUT
WE DECIDE THIS ABOUT PEOPLE, THOSE WE DO NOT KNOW
IT'S TIME TO MOVE PAST THIS AND ALLOW
OURSELVES TO GROW
IN LARGE FONT IT SAYS
NOBLE
THE LABEL A PRECIOUS BLUE
THESE FRUITS ARE IMPORTANT,
JUST LIKE ME AND YOU
WE LOVE OUR ORANGES, BUT
PEOPLE ARE NOT FRUITS
ARE MORE IMPORTANT,
WE ALL COME FROM THE
same roots

Author Samid DREYER
Designer Samanta REBGUEZ
SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY





Moon Soup

All are welcome in this grand home of ours,
while you make our history,
we'll show you the stars,
rest, and relaxation, a small escape
from towns with no outlet signs.
Wars both overseas and at home,
set aside for a honeymoon.

FOLKS FIND THEMSELVES DRIVING DOWN HIGHWAYS WITH NO DESTINATION
UNTIL THE HORIZON GREETS US SAYING:

"The Chalet Suzanne, Lake Wales."

BAGS HANDED TO THE MAN BY THE DOOR,
"THREE NIGHTS PLEASE. FAMILY OF FOUR."

KIDS WILL REMEMBER THIS WHEN THEY'RE ALL GROWN
UP, SOUVENIR DOLLS, AND MENUS ON TRIVETS.

IT'S NO LONGER A PLACE OF GRIEVING.

Years go by and the walls are expanding
with the love, warmth, and memories inside.
Our business is booming, the soups've gone worldwide!
Soon they'll reach the moon in great airships,
akin to those landing on Suzanne's airstrips.

Poet: Anna Wilson

Designer: Jeremiah McDonald

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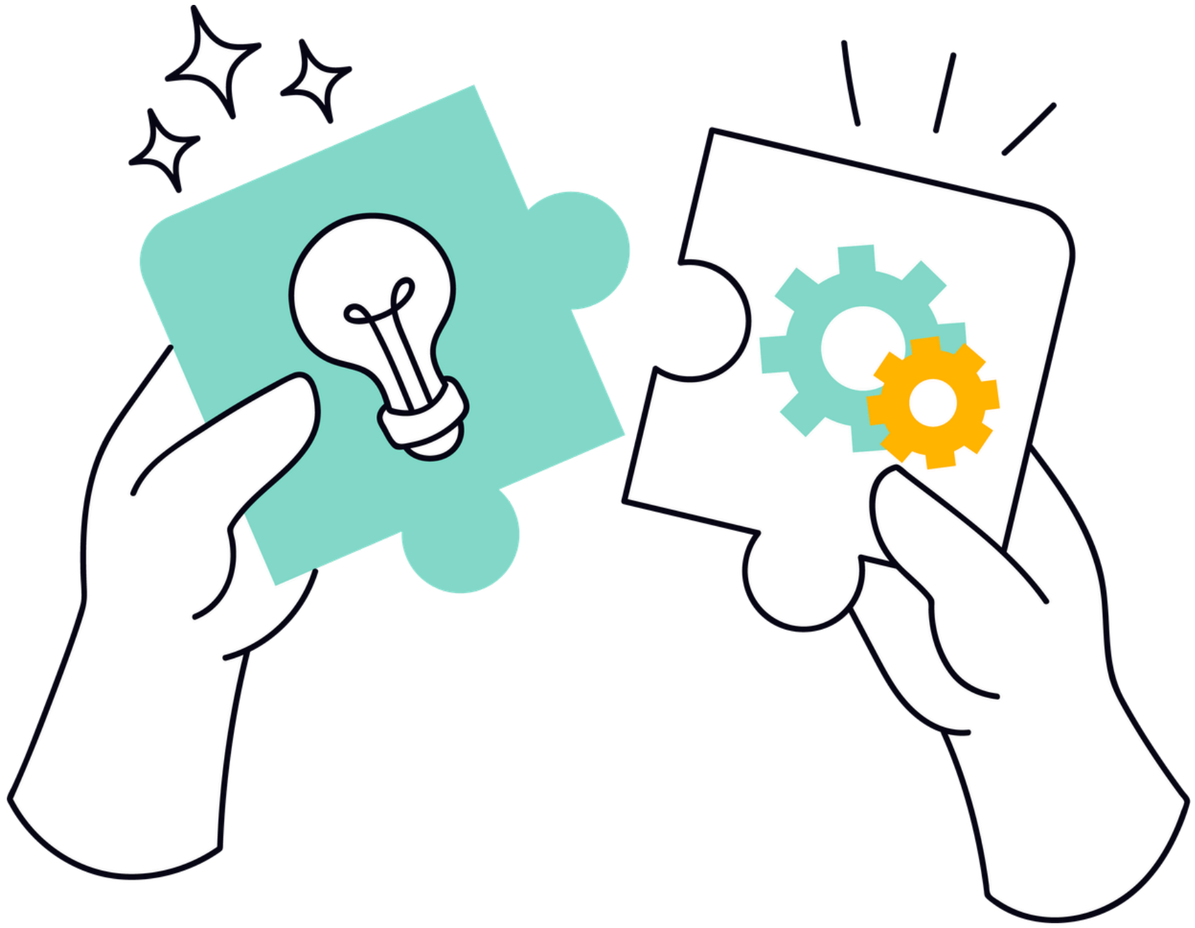

The Singing Tower
Golden
rays and silver mist
twist into a crown.
Painted glass and rosy bricks
rise up from the ground.
Azaleas and irises
waltz
under her gaze.
Ripples in the lake
of glass replicate her face.
If you pay attention,
you will feel the drum
of her copper
heartbeat,
to which the land succumbs.
Her song is laced with secrets
from stories she's been told.
One hundred years
of whispers
and wonders
she beholds.
Poet: Rachiah Cumbie
Designer: Lorraine Willey
SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY






TOWER-FLORIDA


FLORIDA
FLORIDA



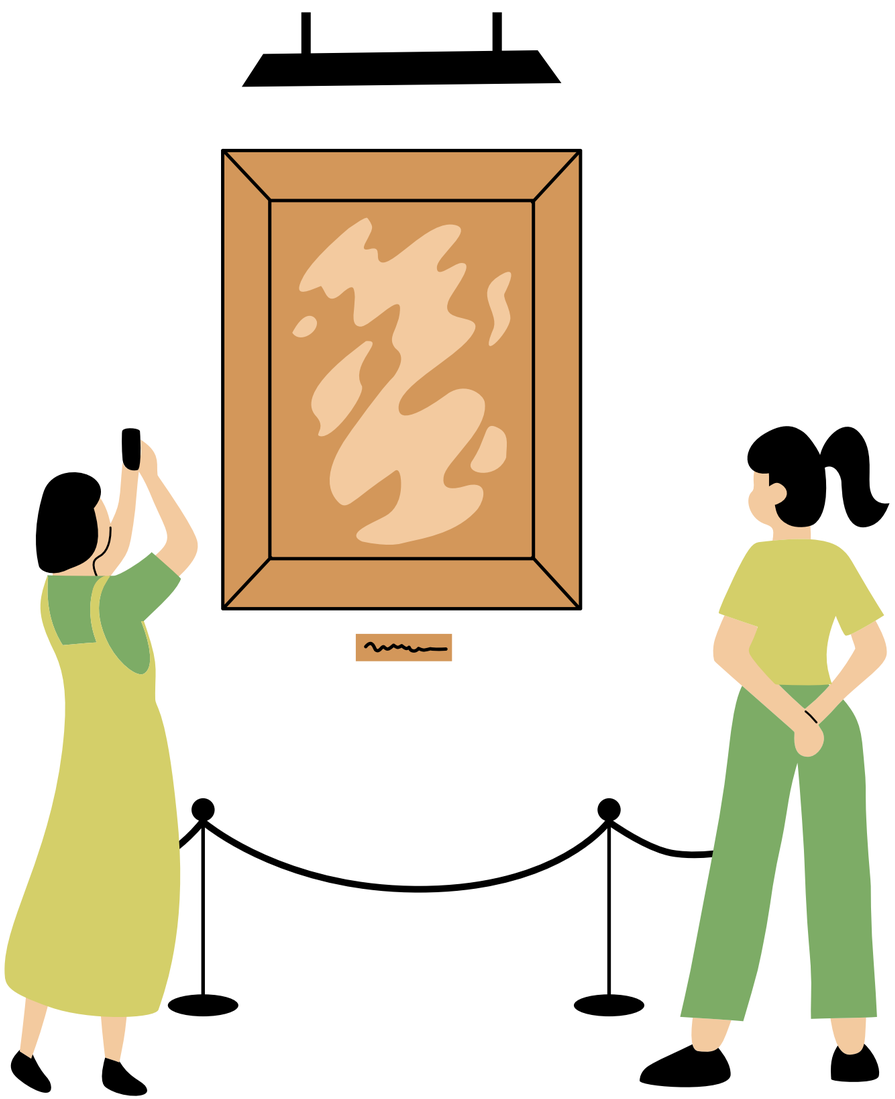
CONNECT



CULTIVATE



CREATE



CURATE



FAM
40TH ANNIVERSARY
SOARING TO NEW HEIGHTS
FLORIDA ASSOCIATION OF MUSEUMS

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