

Laura Sobott Ross
The Writing Lesson
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Some of the children I teach have never held a seashell—
a collection I've gathered from the beaches
of the state where we live.

They marvel at pearly-throated helixes
that open quietly with the ocean,
each exoskeleton exotic in their fingers

as ivory or amber. They fuss over the sand dollar—
fragile beneath its filigreed petals, and ask
to keep the halves of clams, cockles

and carapaces, cones of whelk— stiff-peaked
as whisked cream. They want to lick
the wild salt they smell from serrated edges,

the hollows of abraded iridescence,
but instead they'll compose
a tide of metaphor and simile — compare

a corm of coral to a wasp nest, barnacles to bubbles,
whorled eyes to hurricanes. Coquina, delicate
as a baby's pink toenail. One perfect

angel wing, brittle as eggshell, a boy writes,
is furrowed like a golf ball, a waffle, and another
orange calico scallop, muses a girl,

is a Japanese palace fan,
the color of an autumn leaf beneath
these same trees that never lose their green.