**16-19 Creative – Highly Commended**

**Mahira Mannan, Haggerston School: for ‘Poem’ in response to ‘dinosaurs in the hood’**

while we’re at it, let’s make another film called *A Happy Constellation*.

*Me before You* meets *Dangal* meets the *The Confirmation*. it should start off with an asian girl, doing something that isn’t her maths homework. let the asian girl be special. let’s have a scene where *fair and lovely* isn’t her best friend; she’s painting self-portraits with her eyes closed because she’s that good.

this time round, don’t let Scarlett Johansson steal the lead role, i repeat this protagonist is not white, she’s asian and she’s in the spotlight, she’s nobody’s shadow, she’s not a comedic punch line this time ‘round. we’ll have an all asian cast, all different colours, shapes, sizes, from all around the world, i want kids exchanging *jelebi* for *kimchi*, *tsuivan* for *ras malai* and all that’s inbetween.

she’ll ride her bike and put her earphones in, asian girls belong on tumblr too. but don’t get her wrong, she’s great at driving too but her love for the environment is stronger; her mother on the other hand, [we’ll make a short segway here], is a retired formula 1 driver, now she kicks ass in political matters, deliberating with the local council. it’s all for one and one for all.

we’ll have kpop as background music, it’ll be loud and clear alright. we’ll let them know that bts no longer stands for their overused *behind the scenes* but rather *bangtan sonyeondan*, that while they mock music of other languages, they’re shitting on artists who have broken into the west with a full *korean* album. no. 1 on the billboard 200 chart, people. *we* did that.

i’m sure their only-english-speaking asses will quiet down for a moment. and they’re laughing at *bollywood* now, i hear. how convenient. i hope they know Priyanka Chopra’s net worth before they come for her with their racist misery. to be frank, i don’t’ care, i want us to keep the drama, i want the motions before her first kiss to last a thousand scenes, i want thunder in the background when the

antagonist [read: caucasian man] appears. but mostly i want that asian girl to know that she has hopes and dreams far beyond that tiny domestic bubble, that she has a culture, an identity she needs to take full-fledged control of before they take more it away. i want this movie to be a big fuck you to this popular trope of asian erasure. if i can’t have the million dollar budget, if i have to film this damn film on an iphone 8, none of that matters as long as an asian girl can finally shine.

**Commentary:**

Danez Smith’s ‘Dinosaurs in the Hood’, touched the expanse my heart. I felt as though it was the very words, wishes of some of my black friends – they would have loved to watch this film. In all honesty, at first, all my mind could fathom was *Black Panther*, a film finally giving the black community what they wanted; I couldn’t help but think that ‘Dinosaur’s in the Hood’ was Smith’s very own Black Panther. And so when I tried to respond, I tried to encompass the mindset of my black friends and by that I mean, convey the felicity they felt towards Black Panther and in this case what they would have felt towards ‘Dinosaurs in the Hood’ had it been real. But as you could imagine, that did not work out all. But with a blank page, reading over Smith’s words again, I thought to myself: why do I have to pretend? Why would I need to be a Victoria, a Rachel an Ajoke when films have been desperately erasing Asian cultures? And so I envisioned all the clichés and overused tropes of Asian characters I could think of and like Smith, turned them of their head. I tried to encapsulate a similar sort of dry humour that Smith expresses, through sardonic phrases, blunt rebuttals – I even tried to mimic the ‘fragmented’ structure of the poem that somehow makes it whole, cyclical even; which fits perfectly with Smith’s last sentence that I also tried to use in a similar fashion. In short, my poem tried to possess the same purpose in which I adorned ‘Dinosaurs in the Hood’ with: a film that my people would want to see. Smith’s poem screams one resolute message to me; *whether you’re off the mark or not, someone has got to say it.*