

R.C. Neighbors

Black Boys

— *a cento of first lines*
from Gwendolyn Brooks

When I was a little girl,
the boy died in my alley.

He was born in Alabama.
He grew up being curious.

There had been quiet all that afternoon.
John carried her unprotesting out the door

into her mother's bedroom to wash the ballooning body.
They had never had one in the house before.

Everybody here,
my black brothers and sisters—

clogged and soft and sloppy eyes—
sit down. Inhale. Exhale.

Telephone conversations say to them,
“Think of sweet and chocolate, that time,

a day of sunny face and temper.”
I am already thinking,

Each body has its art, its precious prescribed
blackness. That is the way God made you.

What is devout is never to forget
boys. Black, black boys.

