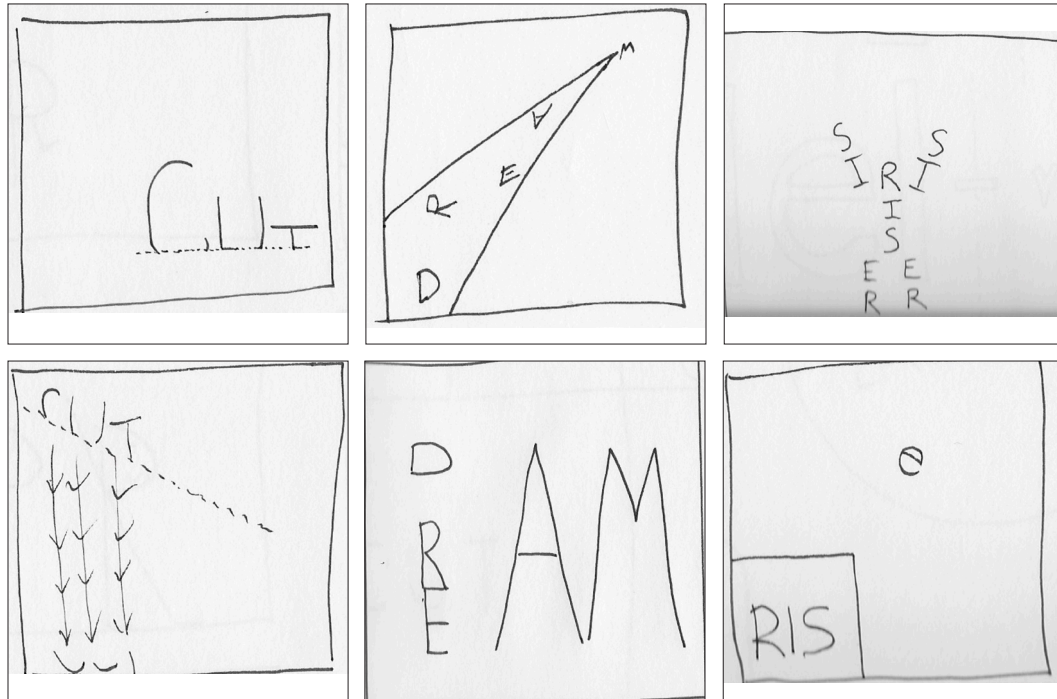


Nick Tippens  
Spring 2017

## Words & Meaning, Form & Content in Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise"

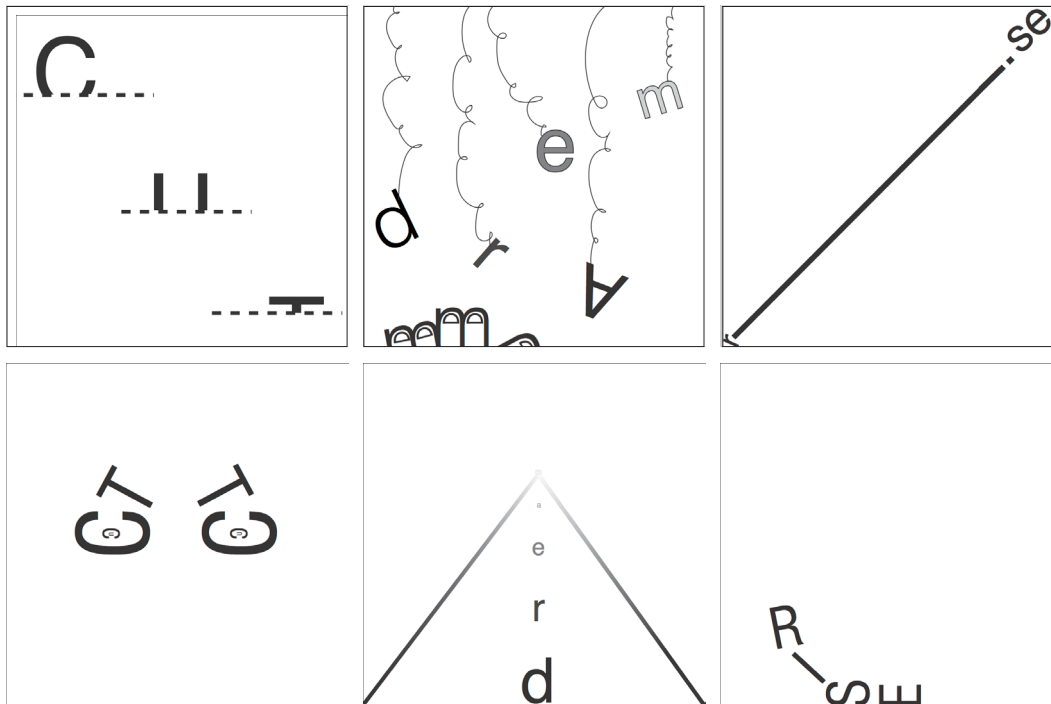
In this project we were challenged to select individual words or sections from Maya Angelou's iconic poem and design three typographic panels that visually represent their meaning, sound, and emotional quality.

The goal of this project was to discover the realm of typography that represents and amplifies the semantics of the written language, and to develop an understanding of the relationship between form and content.



## Early Sketches

I began by selecting the words “cut,” “dream,” and “rise,” attempting to capture each word’s content in its contex within the poem through its visual form on the page.



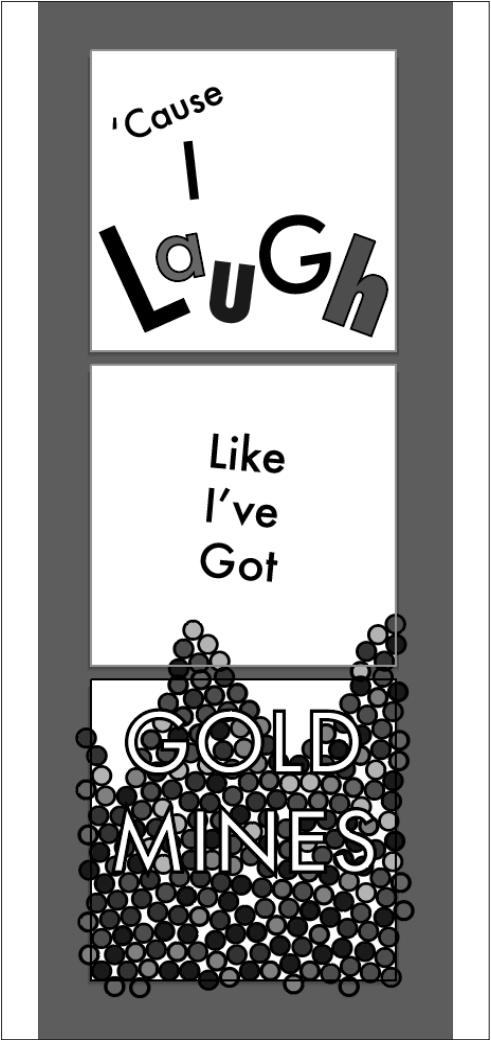
## Single Word Struggles

Visually capturing the essence of the words in the poem proved difficult when dealing with the individual words “cut,” “dream,” and “rise.” At this point, my designs made practical sense but lacked the spirit and emotion of the poem.

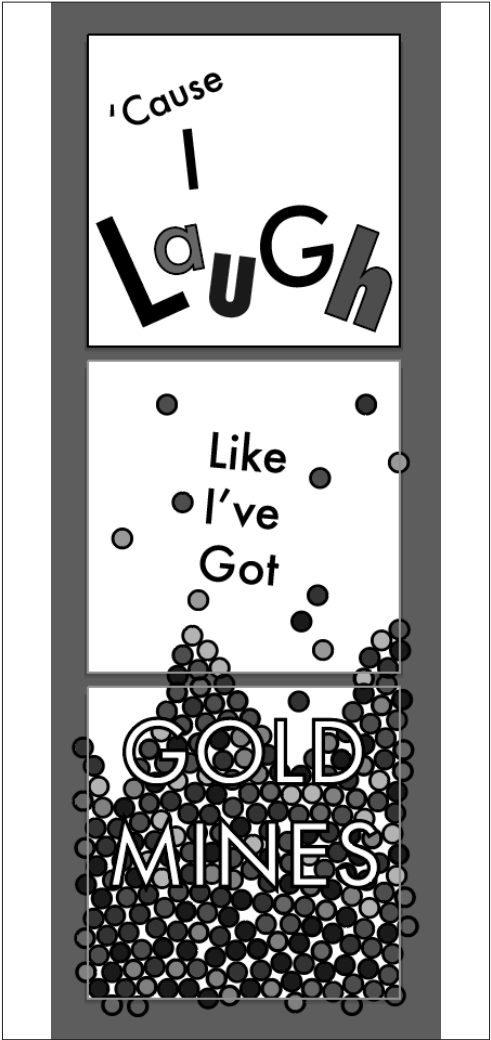
## Leaving the Literal Behind

As I iterated through several weeks of single-word designs, the feedback that I received most consistently from my Professor and classmates suggested that the form of my typography was representing the content of the words too literally. Because of this, I was failing to capture the content of the words in the context of the poem. For example, in the top left “cut” example on the previous page, I successfully captured visually the literal meaning of the word “cut,” but failed to convey its content as it appears in the poem, within the phrase, “You may cut me with your eyes...”

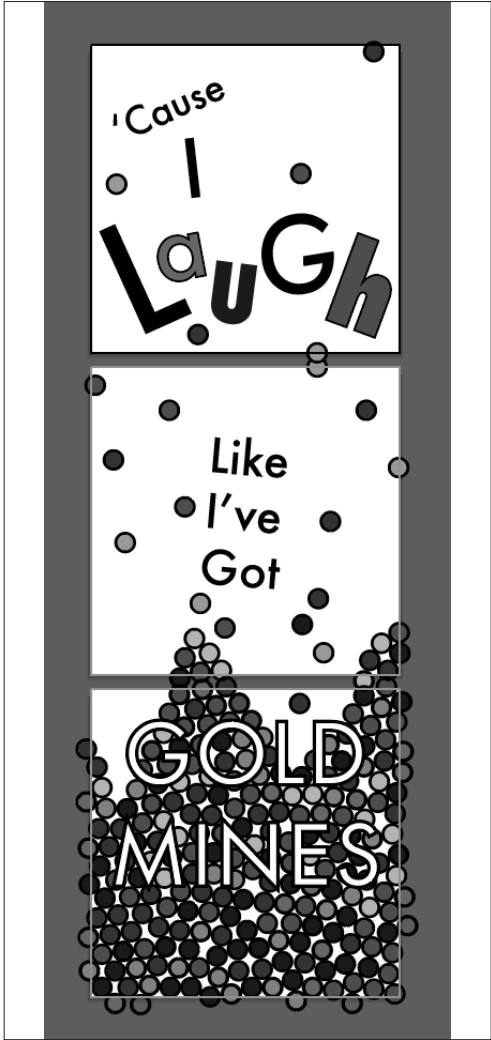
I was also focusing too heavily on visually representing the words in “clever” ways rather doing justice to their significance in the context of the poem. For example, in the bottom left “cut” example on the previous page, I cleverly used the letters of the word to create angry eyes that “cut” you down like those in the poem, but the effect ends up being gimmicky due to its disconnect from the actual legibility of the letters C - U - T in reading as the word “cut.”



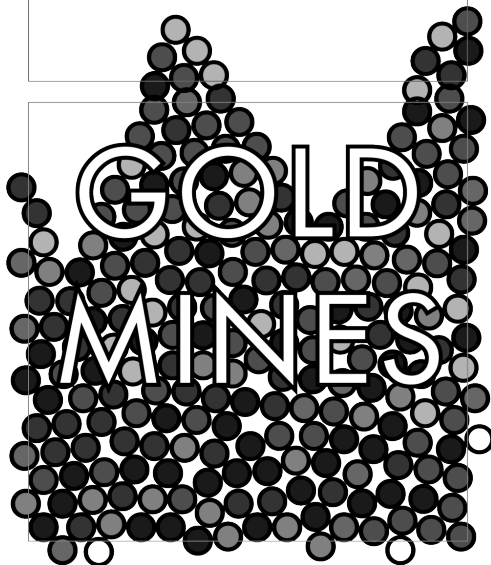
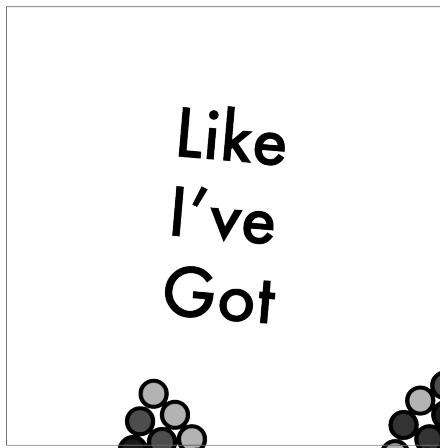
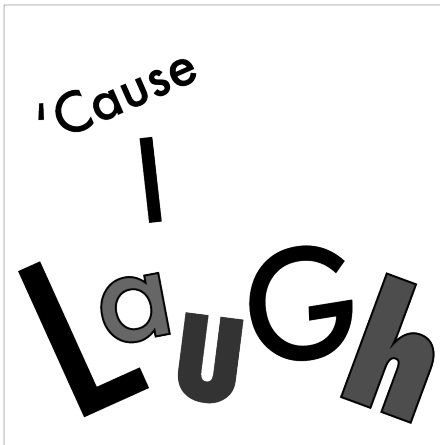
No Falling Gold



Some Falling Gold



Lots of Falling Gold



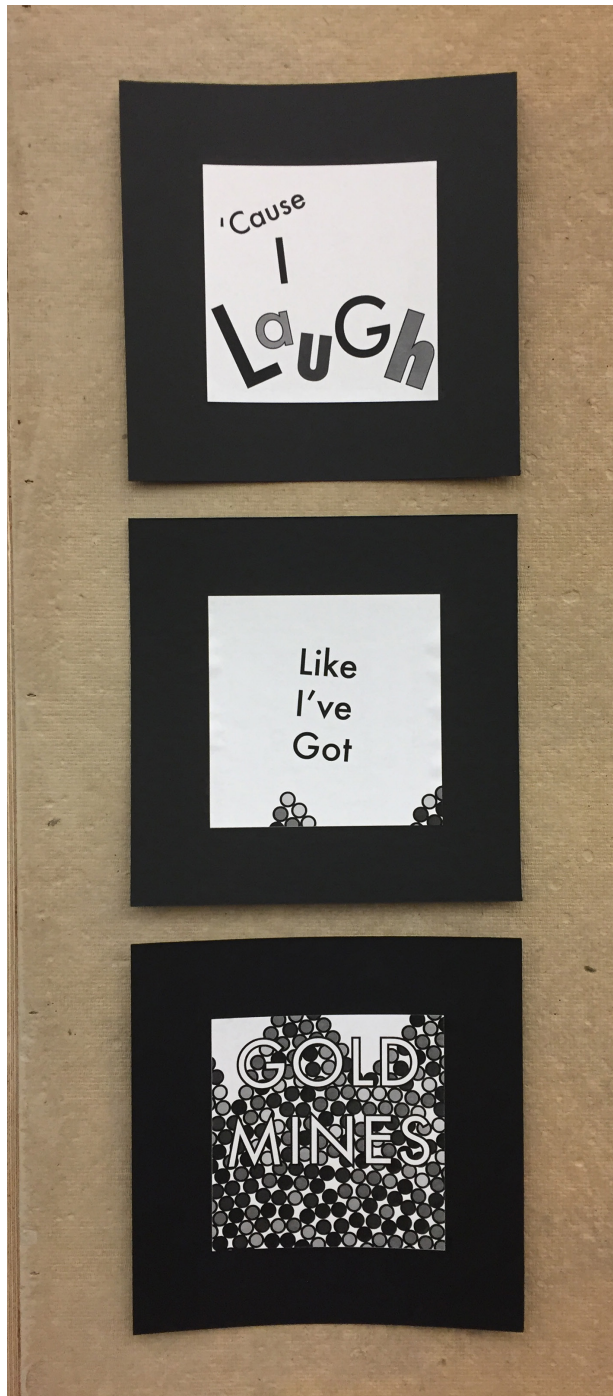
## Starting Over From Scratch

Frustrated with my perceived lack of creativity as the project deadline loomed, I decided to start over and redesign my project completely based on the feedback I had received. I decided to base my three panels collectively around one phrase from within the poem rather than individual words. The phrase I chose, “Cause I laugh like I’ve got gold mines...” provided me with a clear contextual reference point from which I was able to successfully capture the semantic content of the words through form.

I designed the word “laugh” with a childlike, bouncy playfulness representing the exuberant laughter that this line produces in Maya Angelou when she recites the poem herself.

The smaller “like I’ve got” sequence on the second panel is intentionally understated to represent the mitigated significance of these words which serve simply as a bridge to the conclusion of the phrase, “gold mines.” Finally, I surrounded the large, bold “gold mines” with an abstract representation of gold coins composed of lowercase “o’s” with their centers filled. In the poem, the line continues, “gold mines, digging in my own backyard.” The word as well as the coins are represented on the bottom panel as though they are a cherished treasure buried underground.

**“Don’t You Take It Awful Hard?”**  
**Nick Tippens**



The final product was printed on three 6" x 6" white squares, which were mounted on three 8" x 8" panels of black mounting board.

The installation was displayed at the 2017 Clough Art Crawl at Georgia Tech.

# Came From Nothing

## The Story of Benjamin “Big Mouth Ben” Graham

In this project we set out to do justice to the story of Benjamin “Big Mouth Ben” Graham, a convenience store owner on Auburn Avenue in Atlanta, GA who overcame 17 years of homelessness and addiction on that same street.

Ben is a musician, husband, entrepreneur, and motivational speaker. He and his wife Tanya run the store, “Big Mouth Ben Convenience Store,” together. They also operate Motivation Forward, a non-profit organization aimed at assisting the homeless and those suffering from addiction with placement and recovery.

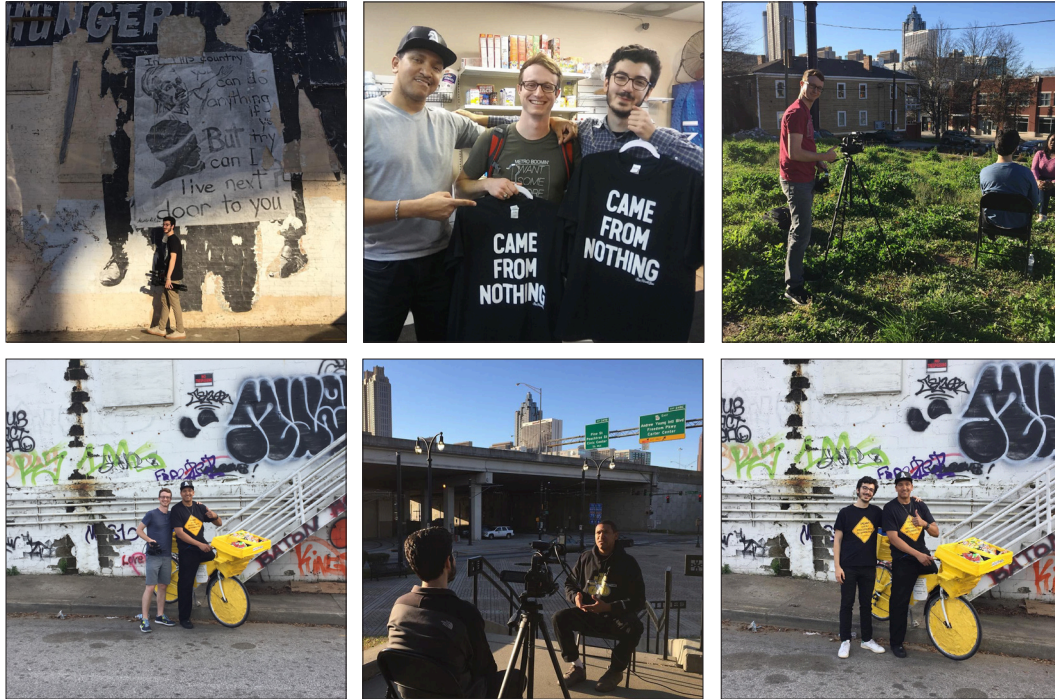


## Envisioned Design Features

This project began as an open ended project with essentially one requirement: Produce something that correlates with the broad concept of justice on Auburn Avenue.

I had originally talked briefly with Dan Moore of the APEX Museum about putting together a documentary about the history of the museum. However, when we met Ben inside of his store one day, I knew that his was a story that needed to be told, and one that would translate well to the documentary film format. Ben's story is Auburn's story. A story of overcoming obstacles to thrive.

We had originally proposed a documentary film 30-45 minutes in length. The final full-length version is 75 minutes long. Throughout the process we discussed structure and focus, considering whether the film should center around the theme of Auburn Avenue, addiction and homelessness, social justice, or music. We ultimately decided to have the film center around Ben's narrative, which touches on all of those themes at one point or another. We also discussed style for the documentary: Would it have a narrator? Would it proceed in chronological order? What type of B-Roll would we feature? We spent time answering all of these questions throughout the filming, editing, and critiquing process.



## Process Feedback

We consistently received feedback that suggested we should incorporate Tanya, Ben's wife, as a fundamental part of the story. To do justice to the role she has played, we could not make her appear tangential to Ben's story. We also discovered that our classmates were excited to see shots of Ben out interacting with people in the Sweet Auburn neighborhood. He is a social guy, and these shots help paint an accurate portrait of his personality. Lastly, we were asked to consider which elements of the story might require careful timing in within the film in order to have their emotion and significance fully captured. Attempting to design these portions of the film correctly was one of our biggest challenges, but it also aided us in our attempt do justice to the content.



## Finishing Touches

The final editing process consisted of three phases.

1. Trimming down repetitive and less engaging clips to keep the documentary to a reasonable length and as lean and powerful as possible.
2. Developing the visual aesthetic of the film through B-Roll.
3. Mastering the audio to optimize it for different settings, removing wind noise and other distractions, particularly from interview portions, and adding music.

We screened the documentary publicly for the first time at The APEX Museum on Auburn Avenue, just a few blocks down from Ben's store.

My personal role in this project was the filming and editing of all of the video content. In a sense, I served as the creative director for the visual aesthetic and thematic design of the film, setting up every shot and organizing the temporal structure of the content in the final full-length version. I also designed all of our promotional material, including posters, flyers, and digital content.