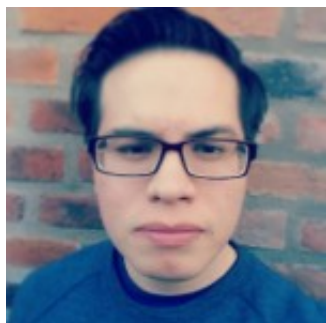


Sebastian H. Paramo

BEGINNER'S ENGLISH FOR REFUGEES

by [Sebastian H. Paramo](#)

I walk around the makeshift classroom where the heat has us sweating for words. The adults repeat phrases like a chorus, Each word is said as if it could change their lives. They get out their notebooks & sharpened pencils while the fan overhead twirls a phrase or two that says, show me the way. Multicolored hands capture each letter in perfect script like a child hunger. They nibble at all the words. Their eyes are on me—they don't stare, they're intent at becoming American like me. I string out a couple more words & hammer phrases into their brains. I want to give them that hammer, holding a marker in my hand, I want to test the refugees. I call all on a Nepalese woman to answer what is *this*? But she doesn't understand *this*—that word *this*. Not yet. She turns to her neighbor from Iraq saying *No idea*. Repeating her phrase. *No Idea*. I turn myself around; writing the word again—they repeat.



Sebastian H. Paramo's poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The North American Review*, *The McNeese Review*, *Canary*, *Lunch Ticket*, *The Oklahoma Review*, and others. He is an editor for the online journal, *The Boiler*, and was recently awarded a residency at the Vermont Studio Center. He lives in Dallas.