My name is Denzel Fleming, better known as “nonotwashington.” I am a multi-disciplinary artist. Performing arts, photography, videography/ cinematography and writing (music/lyrics) are my current strengths.

I was introduced to art as a child in school when there were art programs in almost every public school in North Carolina. I would develop my artistic abilities in after school programs. My friends either played sports or chose to be outside; I chose to be an artist. I would spend time in isolation—my happy place—developing my mind to ‘think beyond the margin.’ Educators would write notes on my report card illustrating me to be an exceptional student with less than satisfactory behavior ‘issues.’ They said I talked a lot and was a distraction to others. There would be times when educators offered backhanded compliments to me during their lectures. I guess that was when I developed an affinity for words.

I started to develop coping strategies by ‘showing love’ in as many ways as I possibly could. I learned: similes, metaphors, puns, idioms and witty ways to scribe the life I wanted to see for myself. Some would say I was hopeful or inspiring, but to me, I was only trying to make sense of the world by studying… “where did it all come from.” I wasn’t necessarily thinking “*why would adults treat me like I’m less than*;” I was thinking “I should figure out as many ways as I can tell my peers the truth—a beautiful truth—sharp, yet soft, to the point… with my pencil.

Principals would call home and question my mother as if something was wrong at home. Everything was right at home; my mother played music to calm all of us. My mother would come up to school to defend me. We would walk home from school (or catch a cab); that would be our time to talk about what happened. I couldn’t tell my mother the truth because she was already upset at having to stop her ‘flow.’ School is supposed to be a safe space, right? My mother thought the same thing, school is *supposed* to be a safe space. I knew it to be quite the opposite for people who have their own thoughts. I knew what I had to do after many spells of being suspended. I had to tell my truth to others.

**The truth is: art heals, music is medicine, writing is therapeutic and mantras work. That’s why I choose to be a performing artist in as many ways as I can.**

My vision is to return to schools as a performing artist to teach young people how to express themselves through artwork. They will learn how to be disciplined when they pick a discipline, just as I did years ago.