

David Walker

OF ROPES AND

As I stutter over the subordinate clause
 in my sentence—misspeak
 and tell her that I'm worried because
 I have ten kids *flailing* in my honors class,
 she cracks a smile and tells me:
 "Words are hard."
 I laugh, but think she's right. The more
 I think about what I say,
 what is said—words *are* hard.
 Despite what the nursery rhyme
 so eloquently affirms—
 words can break necks faster than
 any sticks, any stones.
 Any mouth has the artillery
 bullet-hard words.

Words are hard.
 They do damage if loaded behind
 the right teeth.

So maybe I didn't misspeak.
 Maybe my kids are flailing.

And maybe I did misspeak.
 Maybe I'm failing my kids.