

The simple answer to “what does it mean to be human?” would be to be alive. To breathe in oxygen and exhale out carbon dioxide. To bleed when cut. To cry when hurt. To yell when angry. That, in its simplest form, is human. Though to me, being human goes beyond the superficial. It goes beyond the first layer of skin. Beyond the thin hairs that cover your body. Beyond the natural color of your eyes. Beyond the little lines in your fingertips. To be human is a journey through thick tiers of emotion. Soar through coarse waves of fears. Weave through quilts of pain, and see if you’d be able to withstand it all. I consider my work to be human. It’s never perfect or done. Infused with teachings of Toni Morrison about Blackness and what it means to be a woman in America. Torn up by Victor LaValle’s *Ballad of Black Tom*, that held me in a tight chokehold from the first word up until the last breathing image. Intertwined by Pablo Neruda’s lessons on life’s many struggles, to which he offers me a *cortado* as a gift of warmth and comfort. My work is a reflection of my life. I am the oldest of eight children; seven girls and one boy on my step-father’s side. I’m no stranger to chaos and noise, and I’ve gotten friendly with blunt emotions and sharp words. I’ve grown accustomed to deep sighs, wondering if my struggles was all that was meant for me. To be human is a fight. To be human is a determination. Through so many nights of wondering if this is all worth it. Through days of self-doubt and hopelessness. I let my words mesh together and drip in unison onto the page like blood splatters. My words are a testament of humanity from my eyes. I testify that being human is a loaded thought; one cannot wrap their head around what it all entails, for it is different for everyone. What it takes to be human is an unfinished phrase; we can never put a tight cap on what it all takes. It ends on an ellipsis instead of a period because being human is never done.