

COVID classroom, 2020

by [Paul Willis](#) in the [December 15, 2021](#) issue

Just after eight on a warm October morning,
under a white canopy, the sun comes smoking
through the redwoods into the eyes and paisley
mask of a young woman front-and-center.

She is bent over a quiz on *Moses, Man of the Mountain*,
a novel by Zora Neale Hurston, and her dreads
drop into empty space as she leans
her head to one side. Only nine of thirteen students
are here so far, their motivation starting to fade
at the end of four weeks online and one week out-of-doors.

And yet, a freshness in the acrid air, the off chance
of learning something on this day that the Pharaoh
has been plagued, at last, with the coronavirus.
It is possible, she writes, that he will let my people go.