

2023

## Sit Ups

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### Recommended Citation

Sparks, Kevin (2023) "Sit Ups," *Calliope*: Vol. 35, Article 25.

Available at: <https://researchrepository.wvu.edu/calliope/vol35/iss1/25>

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# Sit Ups

Kevin Sparks

The gymnasium echoed as we boys lined up along the painted blue line next to the bleachers that smelled like pennies.

“Buddy up with the person on your left,” our teacher said, and I got that little spike of anxiety that forms in the recesses of your stomach.

He went first, lying back on the ground; grabbing his feet, I leaned forward, stopping just a little before his knees.

As he began, the muscles on the top of his feet pushed into my hands; his core pushing through his shirt, working to return himself upright.

All the while I counted in my head:

1, 2, 3...

...17, 18, 19...

...43, 44, 45...

Sweat dripped from his forehead; his gasping breaths tickled my nose with every number; his inflamed face inches from mine.

Until his eventual collapse onto the gymnasium floor.

I fell backwards, the teacher approaching, writing something on their clipboard, prompting and I didn’t admit I lost count.

I realized I was also out of breath, but without a moment’s break, “now switch,” our teacher yelled, we shared a knowing glance.

And suddenly, I was flipping over, my back lying on the cold gymnasium floor, looking up at him just as he did, but my spike of anxiety was gone.

I wondered if he would lose count, too.