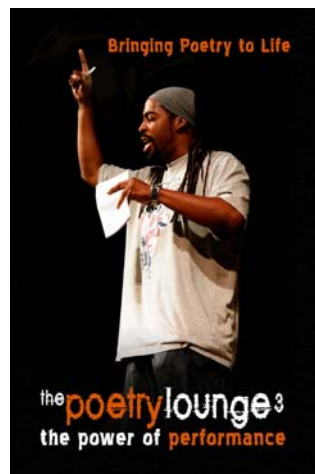




The Poetry Lounge 2 and 3

Guidebook



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Spoken Word poetry is a contemporary form of performance that has revitalized young people's appreciation of the poetic form. Spoken Word can be distinguished from more traditional poetry the way a play can be distinguished from a novel, in that it is written specifically to be performed. Where a traditional poem is often purposefully obscure and is intended for multiple rereadings, spoken word poets have only one chance to communicate their meanings to the audience. Like plays, spoken word poetry is designed to elicit an immediate and visceral audience reaction. Because of this a lot of power must be packed into the poem.

The following guide is designed to be used interactively with the Poetry Lounge DVDs. For each poet, we have included material that can help you point out salient features of the poet's craft to student along with teaching ideas that can be used as prompts to help students in their writing and performance of spoken word poetry.

In some cases the power of the poetry comes from the artist's performance. Just like the skill of an actor can make a play powerful, how the poet performs his/her poetry often has a great deal of impact on how the audience responds. DVD #1 "The Power of Performance" is designed to help students explore how they can use aspects of performance to enhance their poetry.

In other cases the power of the poetry comes from the writer's skill in manipulating language, like in the case of a well-written play. These writers often use poetic devices to help their words have impact on the audience. DVD #2 "The Power of Poetics" is designed to help students understand how the use of poetic devices can enhance their poetry. While every poem has important poetic and performance aspects, this guide is designed to emphasize specific features of each poem so that teachers can use them as models to help students in the writing, revising, and performance of their own poetry.

The Power of Poetics

In some cases the power of the poetry comes not from the performance itself but from the poet's skill in the use of poetics or poetic devices. Poetics are particular language forms that make poetry more powerful. Most are well known (e.g., metaphor, imagery, point of view, rhyme and rhythm) and are often taught in schools. However, it is rarer that students understand how the use of these poetic devices can make their own poetry more powerful and how their use can more clearly illustrate the "universal" meaning they are trying to convey

1. Grandmother

- a. Allusion: This poet uses an allusion to the classic Greek story of Atlas to make the audience understand the power he sees in his grandmother.
- b. Metaphor: The metaphors in this poem (e.g., world on my shoulders, stepladder on backs) are used to reinforce the image of someone holding a heavy weight. The poet uses these devices to give us an understanding of the strength of the main character in his poem: his grandmother.
- c. Teaching Idea: Have students write hypertextual poetry. Have students write a poem that has at least two allusions in it. These allusions (words, phrases) will be activated as a link that the reader can click on to see what the student is alluding to. These links can lead to online encyclopedias, sites about Greek mythology (as with the poem above), or to poetry or lyric databases.

2. Occupations Well Suited

- a. Assonance: The power of this poet's work comes from her use of assonance. Assonance is the use of words that sound like each other but don't always rhyme. There are several examples of this including: addiction/eviction, sleeves/see, and frequency/literacy. Assonance allows the audience to see comparisons (whereas dissonance or the use of words that don't sound good together is used to illustrate contrast).
- b. Imagery: This poet uses metaphors (Braille of broken bottles) and simile (worn like sleeves) as well as imagery (pigeons perch on power lines) in order to give the audience a sense of the setting of the poem.
- c. Teaching Idea: Adding Imagery: Have one half of the class write a question "What is..." with a third word following. Have the other half of the class write an answer (without knowing what the question is). Have the answer contain a thing, a place, an emotion, and a color. Collect the questions and answers and read them in random order. It often creates poems that sound like: What is love? It is an angry orange crate in the parking lot. Use these to revise into poetry.

3. Thunder Cats:

- a. **Intertextuality and Imagery:** This poet uses another text (the cartoon Thunder Cats) to frame his poem. By referencing another text that the audience is familiar with, the poet gives a sense of his point of view (he is narrating the poem as if he is a child). This intertextuality also allows the audience to form particular pictures in their minds (of the Thunder Cats characters). This powerful use of imagery immediately makes the poem have a greater impact.
- b. **Teaching Idea:** This poet uses a persona – a character who performs (a small child). One way to have students develop a persona is to place several pairs of shoes in the front of the room and ask students to describe what the person who owns the shoes might be like. Using their information create character studies on the board. Then have several perform a line from a poem (any poem, it doesn't matter) as the character who owns the shoes. Have students create a list poem (like I Am From) for one of the characters who owns the shoes.

4. Lay Down in Green Pastures

- a. **Metonymy:** Metonymy is a type of metaphor where something is represented by a portion of itself (e.g., heavy boots walked away – the boots represent the whole person). This poet uses metonymy (files grow from purple to manilla) to illustrate the dehumanization of children by the foster care system and (raised by blue collars) to make a similar point about how the system views working poor parents.
- b. **Unique use of Words:** One feature of spoken word poetry is that the poets often use words in unique and unexpected ways. We can see an example of this when the poet uses the word artifact and then says “art, in fact.” This clever shift in the use of a word forces the audience to think carefully about the multiple meanings of words.
- c. **Teaching Idea: Adding Metaphor.** Use the game Exquisite Corpse (developed by surrealist poets). Pass out index cards to students and have one student in each group write a number on their card. Then the next students will write adjectives and so on with a noun, verb, adverb, verb, and prepositional phrase. Have the student with the numbered card collect all the cards and form them into a grammatically correct sentence (using all the words). The sentence is usually something like “Sixteen broken birds quickly fled into the garage.” Have the students copy the sentence down and to discuss the image it presents. Then asks students to think about what the sentence could metaphorically represent (birds might represent fragility, garage might represent technology or masculinity). Have students create a poem where an image represents something else.

5. Look this Way

a. **Memoir:** This poet illustrates one of the key lessons of creating poetry: that poems use particular (and often personal) experiences to relate larger universal themes. This poet uses her own likes and dislikes (a sort of memoir) to illustrate the larger theme of what is involved in creating a connection with another person.

b. **Structure:** This poet uses a well-known structure: that of the “List” poem. In this type of poem, one lists things related to a particular topic. List poems are one of the easiest kinds of poems to write as they use a particular form (i.e., a list) to give structure to the poem.

c. **Teaching Idea:** One of the easiest forms of poetry for students to write is the “List” poem. One of the most well-known forms of list poetry is the I Am From poem (see references). Lists can be generated about a particular object (shoes), a place, a person’s likes and dislikes (“These Things Have I Loved”).

The Power of Performance

Performance is a unique feature of spoken word poetry. Although some aspects of performance need to be introduced to students with ongoing exercises (such as eye contact, voice projection, and movement) some can be taught through using experienced poets as models.

There are particular features of language and action that cause the audience to respond to your poetry performance. Here are some suggestions from the Poetry Lounge:

1. I Finally Got the Courage

- a. **Repetition:** This poet can be used to teach the power of repetition. By starting several lines of her poem with “and I finally got the courage to...” the audience gets the feeling of being pushed forward. This gets the audience emotionally involved with the poetry.
- b. **Speed:** This poet also uses stops in the middle of line breaks. This makes the audience anticipate what is coming. You can see that she also speeds up and delivers several lines at a faster pace. Again, this gives the audience the feeling of movement in the poem.
- c. **Teaching Idea:**
Have the students’ write a 2x4 comic (two panels across four down) based on the “I Used to Believe...But Now I Know...” pattern. In each column students start the caption with the words, “I used to believe” and start the second panel with the words “but now I know.” They will use this construction four times (in the four rows down) and will illustrate each panel with a graphic. This lets students see the power of repetition in that each column, even though it starts with the same words, tells us something different about the author. Students can then use a repeated phrase as the basis for a poem (offer several repeated phrases).
There are other types of poems that use repeated phrases including Irish Curse poems (I curse you with...), I Am From Poems, and many others.

2. Monsters

- a. **Point of view:** The power of this performance comes partially from the fact that the poet uses implied conversational partners. He acts like he is speaking directly to the men who work out and to the monsters. This poet also asks direct questions of the audience. This forces listeners to take an active role while listening to the poem.
- b. **Exaggerated movements:** This poet uses exaggerated movements to emphasize particular parts of his poetry. These movements tell the audience when he is finishing part of his story or joke.

- c. Teaching Idea: Write a short poem on the board (five to six lines). Have the students read the poem aloud in unison. Ask students to suggest a movement that corresponds with each line in the poem and narrow it down until each line of the poem has a corresponding piece of choreography. Reread the poem a couple of times with the students incorporating the choreography. You can then change the choreography and see how the change in movements affects the meaning of the poem.

3. The Race

- a. Speed and Timber: This poem indicates the power of performance in spoken word poetry. If we were to simply read this poem it is unlikely that it would have the same impact. By acting out his running of the race he is actually illustrating the extended metaphor that frames his poem. The metaphor is communicated through the poet's actions and through his use of fast and slow and loud and soft voice dynamics.
- b. Teaching Idea: Have students pair up and take turns delivering a line to each other. The line should be something like "Hey, look at that baby." Have the students say the line with a different gesture (as if saving a baby, or watching a superhero baby fly, or as if the baby is an attractive grown-up). Have some volunteers act out their lines and talk about how gestures can change the meaning of a line. Discuss how the gestures not only give the audience a better understanding of the author's meaning but how gestures can all writers to choose words more effectively.

4. God Doesn't Make Mistakes

- a. Rhyme: This power of this poet's performance comes from his use of rhyme. It is clear to see that the poem's lines rhyme and this gives the audience a sense of coherence to the poem. Although this poem does not have a clear narrative or story (like the poem Monsters does) it is held together by how the words sound.
- b. Teaching Idea: This poet uses a repeated line "God doesn't make mistakes" as the central theme or "proverb" of his poem. Share several proverbs with students (examples can be found online). These can include proverbs like: If you lie down with dogs, you get up with fleas, or A heart that has once been broken becomes a stronger vessel. Discuss what the proverbs mean and have students create a rhyming poem around the proverb that they choose. This activity will not only give students a sense of how meaning should be served by rhyme (rather than the other way around) but will also give them a deeper sense of including themes in their poetry.

5. When I Write a Rhyme

- a. **Rhythm:** This poem is a collection of the poet's musings about his own writing. Like the poem "God Doesn't Make Mistakes" this poem is not a narrative. What makes this poem so powerful is the poet's use of "hip-hop" rhythm. Most hip hop songs are written in a 4/4 rhythm and this poet uses that familiar beat to give structure to his poem. This is particularly powerful because the topic of his poem is about writing "rhymes" a colloquialism for hip hop lyrics. So, the rhythm of the poem supports the topic of the poem.
- b. **Stanza length:** Another important feature of this poem is that the poet performs long stanzas without stopping to take a breath. It is easy to see the audience's appreciative reaction to this poet's skill in vocal performance.
- c. **Teaching Idea:** Have students listen to hip hop songs and clap their hands with the beat. Then take a line from a traditional poem and change it so that it has the same beat as a hip hop song. Next, try to change a hip hop lyric to a different beat (like iambic pentameter). Discuss how the beat influences word and line length choice.