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Photo: Dominique Morisseau, Poetry 2010, by Scott E. Smith

Poetry 2013: Expression in the Right Direction

GAME CHANGERS!

BAM HARVEY THEATRE
Mar 13th & 14, 2013 at 10:30am

Study Guide written by Bryonn Bain,
Felice Bell, and Samara Gaev



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Poetry 2013

Poetry 2013: Expression in the Right Direction is a cross-generation, interdisciplinary, performance featuring diverse, groundbreaking, and professional poets who demonstrate the vitality of the spoken word. It is a theatrical poetic experience, complete with a yearly guest host, musicians, and DJ – unified by a theme relevant to its student audience. For 2013, our theme is “Game Changers!”

The audience is comprised of students from the five boroughs and beyond, many of whom have participated in Brooklyn Reads – BAM’s eleven-week residency program designed to develop student’s literacy and presentation skills. All classes that attend *Poetry 2013: Expression in the Right Direction* receive an in-class poetry workshop at their school. They are lead by BAM Teaching Artists who specialize and perform professionally in the spoken word arena.

At its core, this production is about the power of the word. We want young people to know their voices matter, and that their words have impact. We want students to think critically about the world around them and the future they hope to create. We encourage students to see the value in their stories and to use poetry as a tool to share their experiences.

Game Changers features leading poets and hip-hop artists who, through the power of their performance, have had major effects on the poetry scene and use the power of their words to affect change in the world. Students participating in the residency used poetry to identify game changing moments in their lives, and to explore game changing moves for their future.

The talkback provides for students a deeper insight into the artistic process and reinforces the idea, that, with dedication and perseverance, they can find their own words as an artist, writer, teacher, lawyer, doctor, politician, CEO, or whatever they choose to be. We hope that all in attendance leave with a renewed sense of the limitless possibilities inherent through poetry.

Enjoy *Poetry 2013!*

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Poetry 2013: Expression in the Right Direction

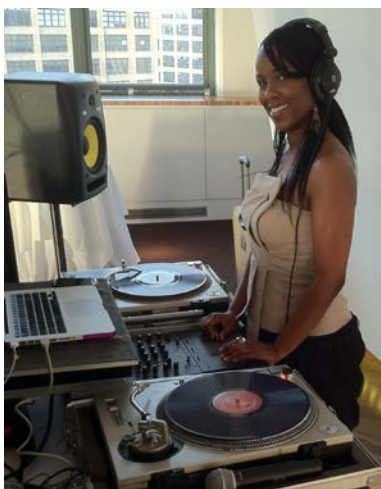
Game Changers!

Artist Biographies



BABA ISRAEL (host) was raised in New York by parents who were core members of the Living Theatre. He developed as a young artist exploring spoken word, hip-hop, and experimental performance. He lived in Australia, working on major community theater projects and festivals. He has toured as an emcee, beatboxer, and theater artist across the US, Europe, South America, Australia, and Asia. His solo show Boom

Bap Meditations was supported by the Ford Foundation and the Hip Hop Theatre Festival. He has shared the stage with such artists as Outkast, The Roots, Rahzel, Lester Bowie, Afrika Bambaataa, Vernon Reid, and Bill Cosby. Previous directorial work includes the Project 2050 (New World Theatre), Countryboy Struggle (Maxwell Golden), and Sharpening SAWDS. He has worked on sound design for theater and dance projects with Renita Martin's It is the Seeing and Rha Goddess. He was co-founder and artistic director of Playback NYC Theatre Company, which brought theater to prisons, hospitals, shelters, and arts venues. As an educator he has worked internationally developing projects with a focus on young people. He holds an MFA in interdisciplinary arts from Goddard College. He became artistic director/CEO of Contact in Manchester, UK in 2009, after several years performing there and leading workshops as a visiting artist. He has returned to New York to develop projects in theater, music, and education.



DJ REBORN is a Brooklyn-based DJ who has been moving audiences for more than a decade with her mellifluous blend of soul, hip-hop, reggae, house, Latin, electronic, and Afrobeat. She has spun at shows by artists including The Roots, Common, Talib Kweli, John Legend, and India Arie, and at museums including the Whitney, the Cooper-Hewitt Design Museum, and Brooklyn Museum. DJ Reborn has also spun exclusive events for Maxwell, Metallica, and Lauryn Hill, as well as for visual artists Kara Walker and Wangheci Mutu. DJ Reborn has appeared on BET's "Rap City" and served as the

2004–2005 international tour DJ for Russell Simmons’ *Def PoetryJam*. She was musical director and DJ for actor/playwright Will Power’s off-Broadway hit *Flow*. As a youth mentor and arts educator with Urban Word NYC, DJ Reborn created a workshop for teenage girls that explores DJing, creative writing, and critical analysis of women’s images in media culture.



DOMINIQUE MORISSEAU (poet) is a writer and actress. She is an alumna of the 2011 Public Theater Emerging Writer’s Group, the Women’s Project Playwrights Lab, and Lark Playwrights Workshop. Her playwriting credits include *Detroit ’67* (world premiere, Public Theater in association with Classical Theatre of Harlem and National Black Theatre); *Sunset Baby* (world premiere, Gate Theater, London, 2012); *Follow Me to Nellie’s* (2010 O’Neill National

Playwrights Conference; Premiere Stages, 2011). Acting credits include: *The Mountaintop* (originated the role of Camae), *Etymology of Bird* (Summer Stage), *Breath Boom* (MCC Theatre), *Shoe Story* (NYSAF), and work with BET/Viacom, Women’s Project, McCarter Theater, and Classical Theatre of Harlem. As a poet, she has appeared with the Last Poets, Sonia Sanchez, and Jessica Care Moore; at the Kennedy Center, Def Poetry, and BAM, and on MBC Networks’ *Spoken*. Her work was published in the bestselling book *Chicken Soup for the African American Soul* and in the literary journal *Signifyin’ Harlem*. Morisseau is a Jane Chambers Playwriting Award Honoree, a two-time NAACP Image Award recipient, a commendation honoree for the Primus Prize by the American Theatre Critics Association, a winner of the Stavis Playwriting Award, and the 2012 Playwrights of New York Fellow.



STEVE COLMAN (poet) is an award-winning poet, playwright, producer, and director. He co-wrote and co-starred in the Tony Award-winning show Russell Simmons *Def Poetry Jam* on Broadway and co-conceived and assistant directed Sarah Jones’ Tony Award-winning Broadway hit *Bridge and Tunnel*, which was originally produced off-Broadway by Meryl Streep. Colman began performing poetry at the Nuyorican Poets Cafe and won the National Poetry Slam championship as a member of

the 1998 Nuyorican Poets Cafe slam team. The Nuyorican Poets Cafe honored

him with the Fresh Poet Award in 1999. He is the co-author of *Burning Down the House* (SoftSkull Press) and *Russell Simmons Def Poetry Jam on Broadway... and More*.



SUHEIR HAMMAD (poet) is the author of breaking poems, which earned her a 2009 American Book Award, as well as the best-selling works *ZaatarDiva*, *Born Palestinian*, *Born Black*, and *Drops of This Story*. She was an artist in residence at New York University's APA Institute, as well as a recipient of the Copeland fellowship at Amherst College. She appeared in the 2008 Cannes Film Festival Official Selection *Salt of This Sea*.

Her produced plays include *Blood Trinity* and breaking letter(s), and she wrote the libretto for the multimedia performance *Re-Orientalism*. An original writer and performer in the Tony Award-winning *Russell Simmons Def Poetry Jam on Broadway*, Hammad appeared on every season of the HBO show that inspired the Broadway run and world tour.



MAHOGANY L. BROWNE (poet) is a Cave Canem Fellow and the author of several books including *Swag & Dear Twitter: Love Letters Hashed Out On-line*, recommended by Small Press Distribution and listed on About.com's Best Poetry Books of 2010. She has released five LPs, including the live album *Sheroshima*. As co-founder of the off-Broadway poetry production *Jam On It* and co-producer of New York's inaugural *SoundBites Poetry Festival*, Browne bridges the gap between lyrical poets and literary emcee. She has toured Germany, Amsterdam, England, Canada, and recently Australia as part of the cultural arts exchange project *Global Poetics*. Her journalism work has been published in *Uptown*, *KING*, *XXL*,

The Source, Canada's *The Word*, and UK's *MOBO*. Her poetry has been published in the literary journals *Pluck*, *Literary Bohemian*, *Bestiary Brown Girl Love*, and *Up the Staircase*. She is an Urban Word NYC mentor, as seen on HBO's *Brave New Voices*, and facilitates performance poetry and writing workshops throughout the country. She is the publisher of *Penmanship Books*, a small press for performance artists, and owns *PoetCD.com*, an online marketing and distribution company for poets. Browne is the Nuyorican Poets Cafe poetry program director and curator of its famous Friday Night Slam.



THE MIGHTY THIRD RAIL (poets/musicians) is an award-winning New York-based trio that mixes hip-hop poetry, beat-boxing, violin, and upright bass. It performs in a range of venues, from poetry cafés to colleges to concert halls, jamming at the legendary Nuyorican Poets Cafe or performing at Lincoln Center. The group features Darian Dauchan on vocals, Ian Baggette on bass, and Curtis Stewart on violin. This bold, urban collective pushes the boundaries of jazz and hip-hop to define the next generation's voice. It won the 2012 Musical Theatre Matters award for Best New Music at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Scotland.



ASHLEY AUGUST (poet) is a 19-year-old Brooklyn native and college sophomore. She is a writer, poet, playwright, actress, emcee, youth teaching artist, and performer. She got her start at 14 in the off-Broadway production *Love: A Circus in Three Acts*, and has since been featured on the stages of the Apollo, the Great Hall at Cooper Union, and the Triad Theater. She began her poetic journey in the summer of 2009 at Urban Word NYC, where she quickly established herself as a rising star by becoming a Youth Leadership Board member and participating in several highly acclaimed competitions including the Urban Word Grand Slam Finals and the New York Knicks Poetry Slam. In 2012, August landed a spot on the Urban Word Youth Slam team, winning a ticket to California to perform at the Brave New Voices National competition. In December of the same year, she was cast in the spirit-shifting off-Broadway show *Black Ink*. She also wrote and starred in a one-woman show, collaborating with award-winning choreographer and director Nicco Annan. August can be seen in the upcoming Sundance film, *Words*.



MALCOLM WICKS (poet) is a 20-year-old performing artist and spoken word poet from Harlem, and a member of the 2012 Urban Word NYC Poetry SlamTeam. This past summer, he attended an International Poetry Festival called Brave New Voices (seen on Russell Simmons' and Stan Lathan's HBO documentary) in San Francisco. He has performed at the Apollo Theater, Nuyorican Poets Cafe, Bowery Poetry Club, Harlem Stage, Barclays Center, and other venues. He is passionate about writing and strives to be a better human being and bless others by lifting them through his words.



LAH TERE (poet) is a humanitarian, organizer, activist, femcee, songstress, and visionary speaker. The Afro-Antillian/Puerto Rican/ Boricua sister grew up in Chicago's Puerto Rican community of Humboldt Park near the famed Paseo Boricua. She is first generation born on the mainland and the daughter of revolutionary educators and survivors of Chicago's notorious ghettos. Tere was a member

of Rebel Diaz, an internationally known rap group with a critical and political stance on many social issues. She is the co-founder of Momma's Hip Hop Kitchen, a multifaceted hip-hop concert designed to educate and empower women on issues including health, HIV/AIDS, and reproductive justice. Tere is also the founder of InnerCityQueens, an organization that aims to provide a mobile safe healing space for children and adults in war-torn countries through events, workshops, and meditation using the arts. Tere shares this message: "self-love dissolves self-hate."



ASE DANCE THEATRE COLLECTIVE is a professional, neofolkloric performance ensemble that specializes in dance theater from the African diaspora. The company is currently made up of six female dancer/vocalists, two male freestyle dancer/spoken word artists, two musicians, and one vocalist. Under the artistic direction of its founder, Adia Tamar Whitaker, a dancer, choreographer, vocalist, and playwright from the Bay Area, this Brooklyn-based collective is dedicated to preserving the past, present, and future of the African presence in the “New World.” Since 2000, ASE has presented work that links modern dance, original vernacular

movement, and traditional dance-theater from the African diaspora to conceptual ideas in the human experience. The current repertoire features a variety of multi-media dance-theater and music works composed by Whitaker, under the musical direction of Sekou Alaje. ASE also performs as a folkloric music ensemble and provides interactive educational performances for children.



MONICA L. WILLIAMS (director) is a multi-disciplinary theater artist and a graduate of New York University and Wright State University. Williams is the founder and lead cultivator of Creative Legacy Projects. This is her seventh year as director of BAM Poetry. Her off-Broadway theater credits include project producer of Foundry Theatre’s Pins and Needles with FUREE, artist-in-resident at 651 Arts, and director for the national tour of History of the Word. Her work has been presented at the Apollo Theater, the Hip Hop Theater Festival, the Zipper Factory, Culture Project, and various regional theater companies. She is active in the field of arts

and social justice. As the national artistic director for Kentucky Foundation for Women’s Special Project, she leads a collective of fierce artists who work to strengthen family ties within the criminal justice system. She has partnered in community-based projects in New York, Kentucky, Ohio, and California, and is a 2012 Arts and Culture Fellow at the Rockwood Leadership Institute. Williams is an adjunct lecturer in the African American Studies department at New York City College of Technology and has served as artist-in-residence at various colleges throughout the US. She is a proud associate member of the Society of Stage **Directors and Choreographers. Twitter: @creativelegacy**

A History of the Spoken Word Movement¹

I. Introduction

Spoken word poetry is a contemporary art form fusing elements of verse, music, and theater. Though widely popular throughout the United States in the early 21st century, its roots trace from the protest songs of the Civil Rights Era, to the blues and sermonic traditions of the American South, and as far back as the ancient storytelling tradition of African griots. Historical influences notwithstanding, the unprecedented global impact of hip hop culture, and specifically rap music, have helped to usher into existence a renaissance of oral poetry which simultaneously defies, embraces and expands the boundaries of previous poetic movements.¹

Widely referred to as simply ‘spoken word,’ the naming of the form itself stands in contrast to the ‘written word’ in which the verse of the Western literary canon is traditionally composed and experienced by the reader. ‘Performance poetry’ has also been used interchangeably with spoken word poetry. Both terms suggest the meaning of a spoken word poem is only realized completely when performed or recited. As one pioneering spoken wordsmith of the renowned Nuyorican Poets Café observes, “A performance poem is a poem written to be performed...”² It is not uncommon for poets performing the spoken word to utilize the dynamic range of the voice and engage the subtle nuances of vernacular speech and physical expression.

The current literature suggests this popular revival of poetry has been marginalized by academia in part because of its emphasis on oral performance. Various incarnations of spoken word have been condemned as “poor” poetry by academic critics like Harold Bloom who famously dubbed the popular poetry slam competition “the death of art.” It has been written off entirely by others as not poetry at all.³ As a cultural practice inextricably linked to African oral traditions, this tendency is consistent with Western scholarship, which has historically dismissed the oral traditions of pre-colonial societies as ‘primitive’. Zulu praise-poems, for example, were once labeled “artless and uninformed repetitions of tribal culture” and considered no more than a “crude accompaniment to tribal dancing.”⁴

Although such highbrow mandates for what poetry ought to be might have posed an obstacle for this turn-of-the-century movement, their popular rejection has in fact helped it to gather momentum. While a ‘poetry’ section has yet to be included in most record stores in America, today one is more likely to come across a compact disc bin with recordings labeled ‘spoken word’ than only a decade ago. Titles such as the compilation, *Eargasms*, or *Grand Slam! The Best of the National*

¹ Based on an article prepared for *The Encyclopedia of Urban Education*: Written by Bryonn Bain

Poetry Slam are among those commercial compilation albums categorized under this heading.⁵

A. Ancient Origins: The Epic Tradition

Prior to the emergence of written language, oral history was the most common means of passing information from one generation to another. The most widely engaged form of this transmission was through storytelling and the recitation of poetry. From the meditative poetry of the Eskimo to mediaeval Chinese ballads, oral poetry is a recurring element of cultures around the world. Oral poets have composed and passed through the generations the lengthy praise-poem honoring the nineteenth century Zulu warrior Shaka, with hundreds of lines of verse, as well as the compact imagery of the Somali 'miniature' lyric. Orally composed Greek works such as Homer's *The Odyssey*, have passed through the generations in written form and become classics integral to the Western literary canon.⁶

Regarded as one of the most developed forms of oral poetry, the epic is a form that has been widely disseminated throughout the world for several millennia.⁷ The epic differs from other literary forms in both content and style. Orations comprise such a substantial element of the epic tradition that Plato called it "a mixture of dramatic and narrative" literature. The presence of "speeches" in epic literature throughout the world suggests a throwback to the oral roots of the epic tradition. The epic narrative was passed to the student by the master storyteller of the family or community. The storyteller or poet customarily played a musical instrument such as the lyre or kora while improvising the epic ode by interweaving native folklore, spiritual mythology and the skillful manipulation of familiar symbols and other elements invoked with each retelling.⁸

The central figure of the ancient epic is the hero. In this tradition, the legendary epic of Mali, *Sunjata*, comprises a long narrative poem which has been passed on for centuries.⁹ In the classical Roman epic, *The Aeneid*, Virgil's hero, Aeneas, carries on the legacy of the Homeric Odysseus and Achilles. While generally considered fictional accounts, it is not unheard of for such works to maintain great historical accuracy over hundreds and even thousands of years. Factual elements of *The Iliad*, for example, were confirmed by Heinrich Schliemann's 1870 uncovering of ruins believed to be the ancient city where the poem is set.

Epics recorded around the world include the Congolese *Mwindo*, the early Irish *Tain Bo Cuailgne*, lengthy nineteenth and twentieth century epics of the former Soviet Union, and the West Sumatra epic *Anggun Nan Tungga*, whose recitation takes as much as seven nights to complete. Other epics range from sacred works such as the Indian *Mahabharata* to the ancient Sumerian epic of *Gilgamesh*. For centuries, the essential aspects of the extensive *Gesar* epic have survived dissemination throughout a vast region reaching parts of China, Tibet and

Mongolia. Even more astounding is the Indian *Rgveda*, which has been handed down orally since its composition around 1500-100 B.C., contains 10 books, over 1,000 hymns, and approximately 40,000 lines.¹⁰

The epic poem has historically focused on a heroic figure whose actions determine the fate of his tribe, nation, or the entire human race. Epics often explore the exploits of a single individual, as a means of addressing legendary or historical events of national or universal significance. *The Divine Comedy* (1307-1321) by Italian poet Dante Alighieri, for example, navigates the faith of Christianity in medieval Europe. The tradition of oral poetry found in the epics of ancient civilizations around the world is continued today by spoken word poetry. The use of repetition, popular speech and “call and response” are among the elements of orality which distinguish epics and spoken word poems from other poetic forms for which recital from the page is of primary importance. As works often originally sung, chanted, composed and passed on without the aid of writing, the epic’s emergence— as a form of *orature* before becoming literature – links it inextricably to the resurgence of the spoken word. (By Benedicto Carpio, http://litera1no4.tripod.com/form_frame.html)

B. The Power of the Word: Nommo

Throughout the ages, the yogis and seers of India have worshipped the “word” god. The Hindus are not alone in placing this centrality on the human utterance. The Judeo-Christian tradition also attaches mystic significance to the sacred word. According to scripture, the earliest and most exalted sign of life was the first audible expression: “In the beginning was the word, and the word was God.” Islam reserves a comparable sanctity within its doctrine of “the mystical word.” Parallels of this kind are also found in the traditions of the Zoroastrians, whose religion emerged long before the lives of Buddha, Mohammed or Christ.¹¹

Long before its emergence as a contemporary art form, the power of the word as utterance held a sacred position in religious and spiritual traditions the world over. In the ancient Egyptian mythology of Kemet, Thoth, the male counterpart of the goddess Ma’at, created the world by causing the elements to rise out of the primeval matriarchal waters with the words he spoke. Creation begins in much the same manner for many of the world’s ancient civilizations: a Supreme Creator whose word is able to bring life into existence.

The Dogon of Mali tells of the world emerging from the generative power of the Word or “Nommo.” An oral creative principle analogous to the generative power of a seed in the realm of biology, Nommo is regarded as the force which brings otherwise dormant forces to life. Whether through mantras, prayers, hymns or calls to worship, the link between these varied traditions lies in the belief that the sound vibrations of a particular utterance possesses the power to bring about

change.¹²

C. Spoken Word Poetry Today

Carrying on the ancient tradition of the epic and the sacred use of the word as a tool for transformation, the spoken word movement has given rise to the resurfacing of oral poetry on the American cultural landscape. Poets now perform and workshop their original work in growing numbers at community centers, colleges and universities, correctional facilities, concert halls, coffee houses, poetry cafes, and open mic nights in bars and clubs nationwide. In the most populace urban areas in the U.S., one can attend a poetry reading or poetry “slam” competition any night of the week. Spoken word poets regularly appear as “opening acts” for major hip hop artists at rap concerts, and their work has a growing presence in theater, film and on television.

Benefiting from this renaissance of oral poetry, literary poets embraced by publishing houses and academic institutions, now have a far more considerable audience than they once had. There are a growing number of summer writing conferences and poetry-oriented programs for urban youth, such as Youth Speaks and the Living Word Project in California, Young Chicago Authors in Illinois, and Urban Word in New York. Thousands of graduate students are enrolled in MFA programs across the country seeking to further hone their writing and performance skills.¹³

As with other examples of oral poetry, the spoken word must be experienced in context to be fully comprehended. If the performance space or time is changed, or if the same piece is performed by another poet or before a different audience, the identity and meaning of the poem is altered. The performance is not peripheral, rather it is an integral part of a “communicative event” requiring both the oral delivery of the poet and the aural reception of the audience.¹⁴ The mood of the audience, the ability and attitude of the performer, the purpose and location of the event, the sound, lighting, and aura of the venue, as well as the sequence of performers are all aspects that may contribute to the meaning of a poem. The verbal text may be recorded and replayed, but audio and visual recordings fall short of capturing the full effect of a live performance poem.¹⁵

The performance of spoken word poetry has become so widespread that since the late-1990s it has become increasingly common for poets to tour the nation performing their poems with audiences in each state in the union.¹⁶ Nearly every year a different American city hosts a “slam” poetry tournament, which brings together teams of performance poets from over fifty U.S. cities and Canada to compete for a national title.

II. Early 20th Century Influences: Uptown Blues, Downtown Beats (1920s-1950s)

A. The Harlem Renaissance

As the final shots of World War I were being fired, a cultural explosion began roaring through the streets and salons of New York City's Upper West Side. Between 1917 and 1935, a northern migration spawned a renaissance that transformed Harlem into the epicenter of the African experience in the Americas.¹⁷ Initially referred to as the "The New Negro Movement," The Harlem Renaissance marked an era when black artistic expression was redefined.¹⁸ While Marcus Mosiah Garvey mobilized millions with the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), white patrons funded the high-society black writers and artists that Zora Neale Hurston dubbed the Harlem "Niggerati."¹⁹

Zora Neale Hurston

Novelist, folklorist, and anthropologist, Zora Neale Hurston was an authority on black culture during the Harlem Renaissance. Her work regularly combined elements of anthropology and literature. In particular, she was accomplished at capturing the language and dialect of black people in different regions of the country and around the world. Her anthropological research was financed through grants, fellowships, and wealthy white patrons. In 1935, her book *Mules and Men*, which investigated voodoo practices in black communities in Florida and New Orleans, brought her critical acclaim. Hurston's most popular novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, was published in 1937. On January 28, 1960, Zora Neale Hurston passed away penniless and living in relative obscurity. She was buried in an unmarked grave in Fort Pierce, Florida until fiction writer Alice Walker found and marked the grave in 1975.²⁰

Langston Hughes

Seeking to embrace and honor the essence of black folk culture, Langston Hughes chose not to emulate his "New Negro" peers then mastering traditional western literary forms. Along with noted writers such as Jean Toomer and Claude McKay, Hughes experimented courageously.²¹ Enduring the chastisement of poets more concerned with gaining acceptance among white patrons of Negro literature, Hughes drew inspiration from the folk orature of blues artists such Gertrude "Ma" Rainey and Bessie Smith in much of his poetry.

In so doing, Hughes laid a rebellious aesthetic foundation that would be emulated by generations of poets to follow.²² Hughes' profound respect for his own heritage and history, as well as his personal struggles with race, class, and

sexuality, foreshadowed much of the terrain to be traversed by poets for the remainder of the century to follow.

Born in Joplin, Missouri, Hughes began writing poetry in the eighth grade, and was selected as Class Poet. His first published poem became one of his most famous, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." One of Hughes' most celebrated essays was published in *The Nation* in 1926. "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" spoke of Black writers and poets, "who would surrender racial pride in the name of a false integration." When a Black writer preferred to be considered a poet rather than a Black poet, Hughes argued he subconsciously wanted to write like a white poet. Hughes famously observed, "no great poet has ever been afraid of being himself." In 1923, Hughes traveled throughout Africa to countries including Senegal, Nigeria, the Cameroons, Belgium Congo, Angola, and Guinea. Whether at home in Harlem, overseas in Africa or visiting European countries like Italy, France, Russia or Spain, one of his favorite pastimes was writing poetry while listening to blues and jazz in local clubs. These experiences inspired a new rhythm in his writing, evidenced in poems such as "The Weary Blues."

In 1950, based on a conversation with a man in a Harlem bar, Hughes created a character he named Jess B. Simple, and penned a series of books on him. Between 1926 and 1967, Hughes wrote two novels, three autobiographies, sixteen books of poems, three collections of short stories, four volumes of fiction, twenty plays, children's poetry, musicals and operas, a dozen scripts for radio and television and dozens of articles for magazines. In addition, he edited seven anthologies. Hughes' published works include: *Not Without Laughter* (1930); *The Big Sea* (1940); *I Wonder As I Wander* (1956), his autobiographies. His collections of poetry include: *The Weary Blues* (1926); *The Negro Mother and other Dramatic Recitations* (1931); *The Dream Keeper* (1932); *Shakespeare in Harlem* (1942); *Fields of Wonder* (1947); *One Way Ticket* (1947); *The First Book of Jazz* (1955); *Tambourines to Glory* (1958); and *Selected Poems* (1959); *The Best of Simple* (1961). He edited several anthologies in an attempt to popularize black authors and their works. After Langston Hughes died of cancer on May 22, 1967, his residence at 20 East 127th Street in Harlem was given landmark status and his block on East 127th Street was renamed "Langston Hughes Place."
(<http://www.redhotjazz.com/hughes.html>)

B. The Beat Generation

Langston Hughes' celebration of folk culture echoes in the work of the Beat poets.²³ The Beat Generation phenomenon itself has had a significant influence on Western Culture overall. During the very conformist post-World War II era, the Beats were one of the forces engaged in a questioning of traditional values which produced a break with the mainstream culture. The postwar era was a time where the dominant culture was desperate for a reassuring sense of order; but there

was a strong intellectual undercurrent calling for spontaneity, an end to psychological repression; a romantic desire for a more chaotic existence.²⁴ The Beats were a manifestation of this undercurrent, but they were not alone. Before Jack Kerouac embraced “spontaneous prose”, the improvisational elements in jazz music provided influential examples of artists pursuing self-expression by abandoning the postwar obsession with control.

The early Beat Generation canon includes three writers who met in New York in the 1940s and 1950s: Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs. By dubbing these struggling students, writers, and drug addicts a “generation,” they were made representatives of a new trend regarded as an influence on countless contemporary writers. In the mid-1950s this group expanded to include others such as Gary Snyder, Kenneth Rexroth, Michael McClure and Lawrence Ferlinghetti. The omission of women in the early history of the Beat Generation is largely a reflection of the sexism of the time. Joan Vollmer was clearly there at the beginning of the movement. Although Vollmer did not write and publish, or like Neal Cassady, have a book written about her; she has been remembered as the wife of William Burroughs who was killed in a shooting accident. However, Vollmer served as an important inspiration for the prolific writers in her circle. Burroughs claimed he never would have started writing were it not for Vollmer. Allen Ginsberg, Kerouac’s close friend and fellow innovator, was rumored to have written his legendary “Howl” after a dream he had about Vollmer.

Jack Kerouac

In 1948, after coming of age during a dismal depression and surviving the Second World War, Jack Kerouac coined the phrase that would become widely used to describe the post-war malaise experienced by his circle of writers: the Beat Generation. Spiritual enlightenment, sexual liberation and ‘anti-establishment’ values inspired the writings of the Beat poets. Before Kerouac embraced spontaneity in prose, however, there were other artists pursuing self-expression by surrendering control. Noteworthy among these is the improvisation of jazz musicians, and the “freestyle” paintings of Jackson Pollock as well as other abstract expressionists.

Kerouac introduced the term “Beat Generation” to describe his social scene to writer John Clellon Holmes. In 1952, Holmes published in *The New York Times* an excerpt from a seminal novel about the movement entitled *Go*. The adjective “beat” suggested a generation “tired” or “down and out,” but the paradoxical - connotations of “upbeat,” “beatific”, and the musical association of being “on the beat” were added as well. The derogatory use of the term “beatnik” was popularized by *San Francisco Chronicle* writer Herb Caen on April 2, 1958, and was considered by some an anti-Communist allusion to the Soviet satellite “Sputnik.”²⁵ Nevertheless, thousands of high school and college students came to

consider themselves “beats” or “beatniks” in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Like Hughes before him, Kerouac abandoned his life of letters at Columbia University for more personally fulfilling pursuits. Arguably the quintessential “beatnik,” he is lauded as a legend among many contemporary poets in part because of another manner in which he followed Hughes footsteps. By looking to jazz and the blues tradition to inspire his experimental writing, and dismissing the standards set by the academic poetry critics of his day, Kerouac mirrored the improvisation of folk music in his spontaneous writings. Like many spoken word poets writing and performing today, Kerouac sought not to see “what the poem was,” but to see “what life is,” and to demonstrate that beauty in the creation of the poem.²⁶

Allen Ginsberg

Ginsberg looked to the cadence of popular speech, song, and various aspects of the Biblical tradition for inspiration.²⁷ Well-known for his avant-garde poetics, politics, and experimentation with illegal drugs, Ginsberg’s personal life also paralleled that of Hughes in that both challenged the dominant mores with regard to sexuality. Furthermore, Kerouac and Ginsberg both possessed an extraordinary stage presence that resonates remarkably with the performance-oriented culture of spoken word poetry today. In 1956, a historic Bay Area reading by Ginsberg further pointed in the direction of movements to come by recognizing the need for poets to do more than merely read or recite poetry to an audience.²⁸ More than any other work of that time, his performance of “Howl” is said to have been a prelude of the performance poetry that would emerge nearly half a century later.

Ginsberg and Kerouac were introduced to subjects such as Li Po (one of the greatest Chinese poets of pre-modern times 701-762) by a woman named Hope Savage. While Savage was one of their original teachers regarding Eastern religion, it was difficult for women in the mid-1950s to participate in the Bohemian lifestyle. Those who did were considered insane, and, at times, removed from the scene by force. Despite these challenges, a number of female beats persevered. Among the noteworthy examples are Joyce Johnson, Joanne Kyger, Carolyn Cassady, Hettie Jones and Diane Di Prima.

Diane Di Prima

Diane Di Prima is one of the most well-known women of the Beat Poetry movement. She was born in Brooklyn, NY and attended Swarthmore College. Di Prima has published over thirty-five books of poetry. Her first collection of poetry, *This Kind of Bird Flies Backwards: Memoirs of a Beatnik* was published in 1958 by Hettie and LeRoi Jones’ Totem Press. Di Prima edited the magazine *Floating Bear* with Amiri Baraka (formally LeRoi Jones) and served as publisher and editor of The Poets Press. In 1969, she wrote a novel about her life in the Beat movement

titled *Memoirs of a Beatnik*.²⁹

Hettie Jones

Hettie Jones was born in Brooklyn in 1934 and raised in Laurelton, New York. She attended Mary Washington College at the University of Virginia, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in drama. She received her graduate education at Columbia University in New York. While working for a jazz magazine called *The Record Changer* she met LeRoi Jones. They married and had two daughters. Hettie eventually published her own works, most notably *How I Became Hettie Jones*, a memoir that detailed her involvement in the Beat Poetry movement and her marriage to Leroi Jones. Her poetry collection, *Drive*, won the Norma Farber First Book Award in 1999. She also assisted Rita Marley in the writing of *No Woman No Cry: My Life With Bob Marley*.³⁰

The beats ignited a movement towards bohemian aesthetics and spontaneous creativity. Unfortunately, by the time that their work had generated a following in mainstream society, most of the Beat writers had descended into drug addiction and obscurity. The Beats not only inspired widespread interest in experimentation with sex and drugs, but their intellectual effect in encouraging the questioning of authority was a significant force behind the anti-war movement, and in the orientalist popularizing of Zen Buddhism in the West. The major beat writings are Kerouac's *On the Road*, Ginsberg's *Howl*, and Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*. Both *Howl* and *Naked Lunch* became the focus of obscenity trials that helped "liberalize" what could be published in the U.S.³¹

The Beats' image as drug-induced, renegade-roadsters came to symbolize a national counterculture that only began to wane in the late-1960s.³² With Vietnam emerging as the next arena of international conflict, social and political art saw increasing prominence. With the assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., shortly after he spoke publicly in opposition to the Vietnam War, the frustrated progress of the Civil Right advocates would give rise to the more militant demand for Black Power. As it was before, race would once again be an issue of critical concern for the wordsmiths of the day.

III. Mid-20th Century Influences: The Black Arts Movement (1965-1975)

The Black Arts Movement was an informal association of Black Nationalist intellectuals and artists during the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s. According to renowned poet and publisher, Kalamu ya Salaam:

...the movement broke from the immediate past of protest and petition (civil rights) literature and dashed forward toward an alternative that initially seemed unthinkable and unobtainable: Black Power.³³

Associated with the militant advocacy of armed self-defense, separation from “racist American domination,” and pride in and assertion of the goodness and beauty of Blackness, the Black Power and Arts movements brought together participants with a wide-range of political and philosophical perspectives, including a spectrum of ideologies reaching from Pan-Africanism and ideologies upheld as remnants of pre-colonial societies, to Womanism and revolutionary Marxism. The divergent perspectives within the movement were often a source of great debate and controversy, yet consensus was met in the urgent demand for black liberation and self-determination that was heard nationwide.³⁴

The notion of “performance art,” as an artistic practice referred to as such, was being newly established in the 1960s and 1970s.³⁵ The predominance of poetry readings during this time was seen as rooted in a “communal tendency” toward the oral tradition.³⁶ This is in part because of the central place of orality in the traditions enslaved Africans brought to the Americas during the transatlantic slave trade, but was reinforced by laws that made it illegal for slaves to read and write. The continuing impact of this era must be considered here since it is common for the members of the current generation of Black poets to link their artistic work to that of Black Arts pioneers.³⁷

A. The Role of the Arts

Poetry, drama, and music (“free” jazz) were among the most widely enjoyed artistic genres of the era. This was due in part to the facility with which music, theater, and verse could be incorporated into movement events. Protest rallies, marches, speeches, demonstrations, and community organizing meetings were brought to life in innovative ways with the inclusion of the performing arts. As with the contemporary Spoken Word Movement, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly when the Black Arts Movement began. One possible beginning might be the 1965 founding of the Black Arts Repertory Theater/School (BARTS) in Harlem by Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones). His Obie Award-winning play, *Dutchman*, was published in 1964, and by the following year a broader Black Arts Movement had taken hold of the nation.

Black musicians were significantly impacted by Black Power politics and Black Arts aesthetics. Anthems like “Say It Loud (I’m Black and I’m Proud)” and “Keep On Pushing,” recorded by best-selling artists such as James Brown and Curtis Mayfield urged popular music in the direction of black pride, self-love and self-determination. Among the most visible artists of the movement were jazz musicians like Sun Ra and Archie Shepp.³⁸

B. Political Organizations

The Nation of Islam, and specifically its chief spokesman in the 1960s, Malcolm X, introduced many jazz musicians in the 1960s to notions of black consciousness that would later drive the Black Arts movement. The foundation for the movement was also laid by pioneering organizations like Umbra, a network of black writers that emerged in the Lower East Side of New York City. As artists became involved with organizations like Collective Black Artists in New York, they honed innovative ideas about their traditions and new identities as artists, activists and intellectuals.³⁹

From the ranks of such groups emerged renowned Black Arts activists and intellectuals including Ishmael Reed, David Henderson, and Askia Muhammad Toure. A nationalist politic infused the work of artists in nearly every black community, and on college and university campuses where organizations increasingly engaged the art and culture of the African Diaspora. The close of the Black Arts Movement is as much a challenge to locate as its genesis. As the membership of Black Power organizations like the Black Panther Party began to diminish during the mid-1970s, Black Arts groups and activities slipped away as well. Whenever it came to an end, it was destined to have an impact on art, culture and politics in America long after it disappeared. Within contemporary hip hop music, for example, strains of the movement's urgency, militancy and cross-genre aesthetics can be found today.

C. Black Arts Movement Poets

Among the leading writers of the Black Arts Movement were playwright Ed Bullins and novelist Toni Morrison, and poets Gil Scott-Heron, Larry Neal and Haki Madhubuti. The work of black editors like Addison Gayle Jr., and scholars such as Harold Cruse, helped to shape the vibrant debates between artists and intellectuals of the day. Musicians like Abbey Lincoln, Max Roach, and Charles Mingus challenged the economic inequalities of the music industry, linked their own experiences with it to larger social issues, and performed explicitly political material.⁴⁰

Gwendolyn Brooks

Gwendolyn Brooks is recognized as a leader of the Black Arts movement. Over the course of her career, Brooks received more than 75 honorary awards and degrees from colleges and universities worldwide. Raised in Chicago, Illinois, Brooks' poetry often chronicled the life, love and struggle of the mostly poor, black residents of Chicago's South Side. Her blues-inspired poem "We Real Cool" is often found in school textbooks. Gwendolyn Brooks won the 1950 Pulitzer Prize for poetry for *Annie Allen* (1949), becoming the first African-American to

win this award. In 1962, she was invited by, then president, John F. Kennedy, to read at the Library of Congress in Washington DC. In 1968, she was appointed Poet Laureate of Illinois.⁴¹

Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones

Amiri Baraka is widely regarded as one of the most influential figures of the movement. Baraka's poetry, theater, cultural criticism and commentary were fiercely radical. He presented the art of the 1960s as an extension of African culture and spirituality, and argued that the Black Arts Movement should be the cultural arm of the Black Liberation struggle.⁴² Written off as anti-white, anti-semitic, sexist and homophobic by his critics, they could not deny that his work deployed an inspiring vision of "utopian unity" for black America which proved tremendously significant in defining the public conversation surrounding the "black aesthetic."⁴³

Before founding BARTS, Baraka's work had a critical influence on Black Nationalist drama throughout the late 1960s. Furthermore, as Salaam observes: Baraka was a highly visible publisher (*Yugen* and *Floating Bear* magazines, *Totem* Press), a celebrated poet (*Preface to a Twenty-Volume Suicide Note*, 1961, and *The Dead Lecturer*, 1964), a major music critic (*Blues People*, 1963), and an Obie Award-winning playwright (*Dutchman*, 1964). Other than James Baldwin, who at that time had been closely associated with the civil rights movement, Jones was the most respected and most widely published black writer of his generation.⁴⁴

Nikki Giovanni

A native of Knoxville, Tennessee, Nikki Giovanni is a groundbreaking poet who began writing during the Black Arts Movement and who continues to celebrate black culture and life in her writing today. The poetry books Giovanni published in the late 1960s made her among the most accessible of the young poets voicing the call for black solidarity and revolution. If Baraka was the most influential male poet, Giovanni's controversial and gendered demand for blacks to, "Learn to kill niggers/Learn to be Black men," from the poem "The True Import of Present Dialogue, Black vs Negro" led her to emerge as the most influential female writer of the movement.⁴⁵ Giovanni was also well known for dynamic performances of her poetry, and the several albums she recorded of her work set to music, including the best-selling *Truth Is on Its Way* in 1971. In her poetry, as in her essays and speeches, Giovanni continues to celebrate black identity, which she sees as the defining characteristic of African American poets.⁴⁶

Sonia Sanchez

Born in Wilsonia Driver in Birmingham, Alabama, Sonia Sanchez moved to

Harlem as a young girl. Sanchez later became an influential writer, activist, and educator focusing on black women's struggle with racism. Sanchez was radicalized first by the Congress for Racial Equality, and then by Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam (NOI). Sanchez parted with the NOI in the early 1970s in protest of the Nation's treatment of women. Much of her poetry from this period, experimental and irreverent in form, content, and presentation, pointed to the problematic nature of the black nationalist project as characterized within Black Arts poetry. Sanchez became known for bravura spoken word performances that sung the cadences of black speech patterns in the U.S.⁴⁷

The Last Poets

Despite their name, critics have argued that the Last Poets' innovative and communal lyricism made them the first rap group. In 1968, Abiodun Oyewole, David Nelson, Gylan Kain, and percussionist Niliya formed the original group at a Harlem memorial gathering for Malcolm X. From their inception, the poetry of the Last Poets represented the militant politics that drove the Black Arts Movement. Their music emphasized both African-inspired drumming and the spoken word. In the mid-1980s the Last Poets was discovered by a new audience when young hip hop musicians began sampling and quoting selections of the Last Poets' songs in their own work.⁴⁸

IV. Late-20th Century Influences: Hip Hop Culture (1970s-)

A. Rap Music as Postmodern Oral Poetry

In the wake of the heightened social and political consciousness of the 1960s, postmodern perspectives on popular culture began attempting to breathe life back into art by focusing on form rather than authorship. What a text says, as a function of how it says it, came to mean more than what an author was attempting to express. The form became the art. Hip hop lyricists, also referred to as "MCs," emerged within this postmodern milieu and reformulated oral poetry by fusing rhymed lyrics with musical tracks recorded and replayed using advanced technologies.⁴⁹

By the early 1970s, rap was gaining popularity as a phenomenon of urban youth culture. Among the first artists to gain notoriety as pioneers of hip hop culture were Afrika Bambaataa, Grandmaster Flash, Melle Mel and the Sugar Hill Gang. Heavily influenced by the music of Caribbean DJs, the "sound systems" imported to New York City from Jamaica by DJ Kool Herc and others were used to play dub versions of popular musical tracks while MCs "chatted" over them. Rap music, in this sense, continued and expanded the tradition of oral performance.⁵⁰

Since its emergence in the South Bronx, rap music has drawn heavily on the

lyricism and layered meanings within the black vernacular and sermonic traditions. Failing to acknowledge the significance of these linkages, some critics have attempted to reduce rap to its roots in the “toast” tradition by claiming it had more to do with “talking hype” than with oral expression or poetry.⁵¹ Arguing for a more expansive view, acclaimed poet Tracie Morris observes, “...not only has [hip hop] made an impact as a genre in and of itself, but it has been the primary force behind the resurgence of the ‘spoken word’ movement even for those who don’t use the techniques.”⁵²

While rappers may not commonly regard themselves as “spoken word artists” because of the particular structure and aesthetics associated with “Mcing,” the link between these art forms has grown considerably during the last decade. The live energy of both the hip hop concert and the spoken word performance resurrect a sense of spontaneity in poetry, “as opposed to the modernist sense of the author as a reclusive inscriber of verbal patterns,” and even challenges the postmodern view of the author as “...a false construction, the fond illusion of old-fashioned readers.”⁵³ The simultaneously distinct and interconnected nature of these related forms challenges rigid traditional notions of form altogether. Indeed, the melding of art forms in this manner has the capacity to “enrich them while finding audiences open to new ways of seeing, hearing, and being engaged.”⁵⁴

B. Hip Hop Poetry and Politics

“Hip Hop is poetry. ...Hip Hop embodies a form of poetry just like sonnets, villanelles, litanies, renga, and other forms. Hip hop incorporates many of the technical devices of other forms, including slant rhymes, enjambment, A-B rhyme schemes, and other techniques, usually parsed in sixteen-bar stanzas, and generally followed by four-eight-bar hooks. In this sense, hip hop (poetry) is a form. Nothing more.”

Jerry Quickley⁵⁵

According to slam poetry champion Jerry Quickley, rap has grown from several thousand kids on the streets of New York in the 1970s, and has become a worldwide movement. As a result, he argues, hip hop may be the most revolutionary artistic movement to emerge in the last hundred years. Yet it is riddled with all of the problems and contradictions any artistic, cultural or political movement with millions of participants can be expected to possess. The problem is not the hip hop stars of the moment claims Quickley, but the “gatekeepers:” massively consolidated radio conglomerates, concert promoters, and record executives who effectively control what rap music is released, and place the vast majority of their resources behind, “...vivid, descriptive narratives of ghetto life” while generally marginalizing work with any semblance of a more innovative social, political, or spiritual dimension.⁵⁶ While hip hop music has grown into a

multi-billion dollar industry over the last decade, the demographics of the rap audience have evolved considerably. As media conglomerates capitalized on an increasingly white suburban hip hop consumer base, commercial rap records have come to be criticized by hip hop generation poets as no more than "...amazing ways to talk about the same ol' [ideas]."

Today's commercial hip hop music, according to poet/actor/MC Saul Williams, is "...mainly concerned with depicting a rough street life devoid of hope, or an upscale designer life devoid of thought..."⁵⁷ Indeed, by 1990, "...virtually all major record chain store distribution (was) controlled by six major record companies: CBS, Polygram, Warner, BMG, Capitol-EMI, and MCA."⁵⁸ These corporate media monopolies, primarily in control of global music distribution, have found little incentive to foster exposure of hip hop's diversity in the national or international arena. "Underground" hip hop, comprised of countless local artists that lack access to far reaching distribution networks, represents the vast majority of the rap music produced in the United States and worldwide.

Regardless of their work's content, most of these artists never receive nearly the support their talent warrants. Quickley explains: "Homogenization is much easier and safer for radio stations and labels than innovation and the massive risks of capital that are part of it."⁵⁹ The commercialization and over-amplification of a very narrow segment of rap music is a problem that has inspired many hip hop generation poets to seek other forms of creative expression. Although spoken word poetry provided a space beyond these tensions a decade ago, as the art form is increasingly popularized and commodified, the circumstances constraining the evolution of rap music threaten to arise in the spoken word arena as well.

C. Poetry Competitions

Hip Hop Battles

Beginning in the late-1970s, rap "battles" emerged as the ultimate test of lyrical skill in hip hop culture. A battle involves at least two lyricists, accompanied by an instrumental track, engaged in a back-and-forth rhyming competition. Likened to lyrical boxing match, in which a victor is customarily determined by audience applause. Increasing with the rising popularity of rap during the 1980s, battle rhymes ultimately came to be recorded, and could either significantly enhance or severely damage the career of the wordsmith judged to have won or lost.

Historic rap battles during the early-1980s featured clashes involving rap icons such as Kool Moe Dee and Busy Bee, and the Brooklyn-based rap group UTFO vs. Queens native Roxanne Shante. One of the most legendary battles of the past three decades featured another Queens rapper, MC Shan, and South Bronx-bred KRS-One. KRS-One's classic, "The Bridge is Over," was a

response record to MC Shan's pioneering release, "The Bridge."⁶⁰

In the 1990s, Tupac and the Notorious BIG both topped the charts as fans eagerly awaited the release of their next battle record. The murders of Tupac and BIG in 1996 and 1997 brought an end to their exchange, and for the next few years high-profile battles on record came to a halt. More recently, rap stars have revived the tradition by responding to each other's "diss" records. These battles have included clashes between rappers such as Ja-Rule and 50 Cent, Nas and Jay-Z, and the lesser-known rapper Ray Benzino, who only appeared on Billboard's top-selling chart after launching his controversial attack on multi-platinum rapper Eminem.⁶¹

From Poetry Bouts to Slam Poetry

In 1981, bartender and poet Al Simmons ran his first "poetry bout" in Chicago. Inspired by the idea of putting on a lyrical boxing contest, not unlike the rap battles launched years earlier in New York City, Simmons first bout was a three-fight card featuring a ten-round fight, billed as the WPA's "Main Event" Poetry Fight. The poets traded poem for poem and verse for verse. Simmons held two additional bouts later that year in Chicago's Old Town, and the other at a club in the Wrigley Field area.⁶² By the mid-1980s, the *Chicago Tribune* reported of another local poet and performance artist, Marc Smith, who was hosting poetry competitions not entirely unlike Simmons' bouts. Smith dubbed his bard battles "slams" and staged them at the Green Mill Lounge, a landmark jazz bar and former Al Capone Speakeasy, in Chicago's Uptown area.⁶³

The poetry slam is a contest in which judges are generally randomly selected from the audience, and asked to rank each poem performed on a scale of one to ten. While the specifics may vary depending on the particular venue, the initial rules allowed each poet three minutes to perform an original poem. Smith launched the slam in Chicago and encouraged the audience to let each poet know exactly what they thought of their work by reacting to the performance as they saw fit.

By establishing an environment in which crowd participation was expected, poetry slams have helped to build a broader audience for the spoken word. The weekly poetry slam in Chicago spread across the nation in the years following its inception, with individual poets and poetry teams from almost every state in the union ultimately convening for an annual spoken word poetry tournament. More than fifty cities were recently represented in Chicago for the tenth anniversary of the poetry slam. Beyond its rapid spread within the United States, slam championships have been held internationally in England, Germany, Israel, and Sweden.

Smith praises the slam as responsible for bringing together people from diverse backgrounds, moving everyday folks to become passionately involved with art,

performance, words and ideas, and giving others a sense of purpose and direction by challenging them to examine themselves. Nonetheless, Smith acknowledges how the slam has also afforded young poets the opportunity to mimic the voice of others they hear on a CD or see on television. He regrets that the wide range of styles, personalities, characters, and subject matter alive in the early years of slam poetry have come to be homogenized into a “rhetorical style” designed to secure winning scores.

Whether it is to the credit of the Chicago-inspired poetry bouts and slams that have swept the nation, or the pioneering New York City rap battles that laid the foundation for the global impact of hip hop culture, spoken word poetry today enjoys a growing worldwide audience in cafes, coffeehouses, concert halls, bars, theaters, and increasingly within the academy. Poetry anthologies seemed to reproduce themselves, literary magazines that would formerly have perished after a year remain in print, independent publishers have gained substantial readership, and there is an abundance of CDs and videos introducing the next generation to new paths to poetry.⁶⁴

D. The MultiMedia Poetry Renaissance

At the epicenter of the national spoken word explosion is the Nuyorican Poets Café, one of the oldest and most influential spoken word cafes in the country. Poet and producer Bob Holman brought the poetry slam to the café in the early 1990s.⁶⁵ The Nuyorican continues to hold a packed-to-capacity slam each week, in addition to its regular schedule of youth events, theater festivals, and the longest running hip hop open mic night in New York City.⁶⁶

Rap music was propelled into the global spotlight during the first decade of heightened media focus on hip hop culture; 1980s motion pictures like *Wildstyle*, *Breakin'*, *Beat Street*, and *Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo*, to name a few, would be followed by the advent of television shows such as *Yo! MTV Raps* and the *Fresh Prince of Bel Air*. Beginning in the 1990s, a series of theater productions, television shows, and films would similarly bring widespread attention and acclaim to spoken word. While the poetry slam had taken root in Chicago barrooms and been replicated by thousands around the nation, the multimedia attention that would introduce millions to the art of performance poetry would reflect the aesthetic of artists emerging from New York's innovative underground arts scene, and, most notably, from the Nuyorican.

In 1996, a groundbreaking ensemble musical entitled: *Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk*, took Broadway theater by storm.⁶⁷ Winning four Tony Awards with the direction of George C. Wolfe, the choreography of Savion Glover, and the poetry of Nuyorican slam champion Reg E. Gaines. In the same year, Emmy-winner Paul Devlin directed a feature-length documentary entitled *SlamNation* about the

1996 National Poetry Slam in Portland, Oregon.⁶⁸ Devlin approached the event from a sports-journalism perspective, offering insight into the psychology of the poets and their strategies for competition through interviews and live footage of the competition. The adrenaline-driven performances of former *Globe* columnist Patricia Smith, recently elected International Poetry Slam president Taylor Mali, and Nuyorican poet/actor/recording artist Saul Williams, among others, ushered in a new era for poetry in movie theaters nationwide.

The following year, a Chicago-based poet, performer, author and national slam champion, Regie Gibson, would help catapult the impact of the spoken word movement even further. His life and work were the inspiration for New Line Cinema's 1997 motion picture, *Love Jones*, starring Larenz Tate, Nia Long, Bill Bellamy and Isaiah Washington.⁶⁹ In 1998, director Marc Levin's totally improvised, low-budget film, *Slam*, was named Best Feature Film at the Sundance Film Festival with a multicultural cast including the same acclaimed hip hop-inspired poet who had entered the spotlight two years earlier in Devlin's documentary, *Saul Williams*.⁷⁰ Poet/actor Mums the Schema, another Nuyorican wordsmith previously featured with Williams in *SlamNation*, appeared as a character appropriately named "Poet" on the prison drama *Oz*. Using the poetic sensibility Mums had also honed at the Lower East Side café, *Homicide* producer Tom Fontana took viewers inside a fictive experimental correctional facility, and worked to bring a philosophical perspective to incarceration in this HBO series.⁷¹

In 2001, Miramax Films released *Piñero*, a film capturing the turbulent life of Puerto Rican poet, playwright, actor, and Nuyorican co-founder, Miguel Piñero. A Latino icon that captivated New York City's elite in the 1970s and 80s, Piñero had a life filled with contrasts. Piñero was a formerly incarcerated Tony Award-nominee, a heroin addict whose poetry was a pre-cursor to hip-hop, and a writer of hit TV shows whose life was cut short at age forty. The film chronicles his rise from prison to the Broadway premiere of his play *Short Eyes*, produced by The Public Theater's Joseph Papp.⁷²

By December of 2001, HBO aired its first season of *Def Poetry Jam*. This televised showcase has featured both well-established and up-and-coming poets from across the country, and was accompanied by the release of the 283-page anthology, *Bum Rush the Page: A Def Poetry Jam*, edited by acclaimed poet Tony Medina.⁷³ This weekly 30-minute TV series placed spoken word center-stage in homes throughout the United States and abroad using the revised format of its predecessor, *Def Comedy Jam*, also backed by hip hop mogul Russell Simmons and aired on HBO.⁷⁴

In November 2002, a staged version of this televised poetry reading opened at the Longacre Theatre in New York City. Simmons once again enlisted the expertise of Stan Lathan, along with a hip hop DJ, and a dynamic troupe of young, seasoned

poets to present *Def Poetry Jam on Broadway*.⁷⁵ Six of the nine poets comprising the cast, from cultural backgrounds as vastly different as acclaimed Palestinian author/activist Suheir Hammad and internationally renowned Chinese-Jamaican performance poet Staceyann Chin joined the Tony-award winning show after several years of performing at the Nuyorican as well.⁷⁶

Despite the acclaim the show has received, critics argue that the popularization of poetry under the Def Poetry Jam brand threatens the integrity of the art form. Medina makes clear his apprehension with regard to the rush of poets to gain the exposure offered by these televised and staged shows. In the opening pages of *Bum Rush the Page*, he laments: “A good number of folks running around calling themselves poets care less about poetry than about blowing up. Serious poets who also happen to perform well on stage are constantly being called “Spoken word artists” and are not taken seriously as writers. Poets (especially those of color) who use words to effect change are therefore ghettoized by those who confer critical approval as simply oral, urban, or street poets. In other words, they are not real writers because they’re not busy polishing their poems until they virtually disappear...”⁷⁷

E. Brave New Voices

Following the success of the HBO series *Russell Simmons Def Poetry Jam* and Tony-award winning *Def Poetry Jam on Broadway*, Russell Simmons found new inspiration in the youth poetry slam scene. In 2009, HBO aired *Russell Simmons Presents Brave New Voices*, a seven-part series that followed youth slam teams from New York, San Francisco, Ft. Lauderdale, Ann Arbor, Hawaii, and Philadelphia as they prepared for a chance to compete at the 2008 Brave New Voices National Youth Poetry Slam Championship in Washington, DC. Brave New Voices is an annual festival that features teen poetry slam champions from cities around the world. This monumental gathering was created by Youth Speaks, a national literacy arts organization based in San Francisco.

According to James Kass, founder and Executive Director of Youth Speaks, it is the duty of the poet to, “speak to the human condition from multiple viewpoints and multiple voices” and the poets of Brave New Voices do this with passion, intelligence, and courage. According to Kass, “The young people who come to Brave New Voices fit into this tradition of storytellers who are speaking up and out about issues that are critical to them. The work we do – and the poems a new generation of poets is writing and performing – is about moving away from silence and moving toward voice.”

Youth Speaks serves over 200,000 youth annually, challenging young people to find, develop, publicly present, and apply their voices as creators of societal change using the spoken word as a primary means of expression. Brave New

Voices has taken place at esteemed venues such as the Kennedy Center, the Smithsonian, The San Francisco Opera House, The Apollo Theater, and the Chicago Theater, drawing thousands of audience members each year. The first Brave New Voices festival took in San Francisco in and featured 43 youth poets. In 2011, over 500 poets from 50 cities will participate in this historic event. Source: www.bravenewvoices.org/2010/07/12/whytheshowmatters/

F. The Publishing Revolution

While mainstream publishing houses have been slow to promote spoken word poetry, a new crop of small presses are giving poets another avenue for publishing their work and reaching a larger audience with their words. Penmanship Books, founded by writer and performance poet Mahogany L. Browne, was created in direct response to what Browne calls the unyielding hierarchy of the literary world. Penmanship currently hosts 12 authors including Eboni Hogan (2010 Women of the World Champion), Justin Long Moton (NYC's Youth Poet Laureate), and several internationally and nationally recognized performance poets.

Cypher Books was founded in 2005 by publisher Ram Devineni (Rattapallax Press) and poet Willie Perdomo (*Where a Nickel Costs a Dime, Smoking Lovely*). The imprint is devoted to publishing the best contemporary poetry. Current authors include Roger Bonair-Agard (*Tarnish and Masquerade, Gully*), Suheir Hammad (*ZaatarDiva, breaking poems*), Rachel McKibbens (*Pink Elephant, 2009 Women of the World Slam Champion*), and John Murillo (*Up Jumps the Boogie*). Hammad, a veteran for the Nuyorican Poets Cafe and *Russell Simmons Def Poetry Jam*, won the 2009 Arab American Book Award for First Prize in Poetry for her collection *breaking poems*, published by Cypher Books.

Derrick Brown, a former paratrooper for the 82nd Airborne, created Write Bloody Press after spending years as a touring poet, selling out venues in the U.S. and beyond. Realizing the untapped potential in the contemporary poetry and spoken word market, Brown sought to create a publishing house that elevated poets to rock star status. His goal is to find the best authors and market them to the world. "It's about mobilizing this new movement," Brown says. As is often the case, the poet speaks hoping his or her voice will find an audience. These independent publishers are doing their part to make sure a host of new voices are being heard.

<http://www.muzzlemagazine.com/mahogany-browne-interview.html>
<http://www.boiseweekly.com/boise/poet-derrick-brown-blends-rock-n-poetry/Content?oid=2062995>

G. The Next Generation Speaks

The product of a Japanese mother and a Jewish father, Sarah Kay began performing poetry at New York's Bowery Poetry Club when she was just fourteen years old. Four years later, in 2006, she bested numerous other poets to make it onto the Bowery Poetry Club's National Slam Team, NYC Urbana, and was the youngest poet to participate in the 2006 National Poetry Slam competition in Austin, Texas. Sarah Kay is also the founder of Project V.O.I.C.E (Vocal Outreach Into Creative Expression) an organization that encourages people, particularly teenagers, to use spoken word as a tool for understanding the world and self, and a medium for vital expression.

In 2011, Kay was invited to be a featured presenter at the annual TED conference (Technology, Entertainment, Design), an exclusive gathering of the world most fascinating thinkers and doers. Past TED speakers include: Bill Gates, Madeleine Albright, and Bono. If there was ever a doubt that young people could change the world, Kay certainly disproves that theory. Sarah Kay is one of the many examples of young people who have accessed their voice, their passion, and potential through the spoken word.

www.project-voice.net

<http://ted.com>

V. Special Needs Students. What Learning is Made of: Poetry as a Tool for Transformative Education by Samara Gaev

The introduction of performance poetry and spoken word into the classroom serves to crystallize the linguistic, pedagogical, spiritual, socio-political, cultural, and economic struggle for justice in our educational system. It is an opportunity to create social change. This is initiated through the activation of young voices and the building of community that comes from facilitating a safe environment in which young people have a platform to narrate their own stories and share visions of creative change and growth. Poetry as an oral art form is an empowering tool that holds the potential to transform the individual, which in turn transforms our communities. Through the incorporation of spoken word into our curricula with high school students, personal development, social justice, community building, accountability, and vision become embedded in the production of knowledge and cannot be disentangled from American education.

Creating a space for young voices to stand up, speak up, and tell *their* stories can break down the walls that we create around academia and reconfigure what learning is made of. In addition to placing value on that which our students can comprehend, analyze, memorize, and criticize, we are also privileging that which they already know—their memories, their concerns, their perspectives, their stories—that which the world must learn from them. Rigorous poetic education, inclusive of performance, delivers the written word from the page to the stage—referencing a history of oral tradition and storytelling—and invites young voices to join the lineage of leaders, change-makers, and artists who have left an imprint on society. Our goal becomes to encourage and support students to source their own experiences, anxieties, hopes, dreams, and learned information to create original poetic work. Once we have students narrating their own stories, connecting themselves to those who have come before them, and re-imagining their futures, then we are working with an empowered population of new thinkers.

Within the context of facilitating poetry and spoken word workshops inside of New York City classrooms, we must take into account the varied academic levels and personal life experiences reflected in our student bodies. Even when our classrooms do not change, our students do. Because poetry, although often historically referential, politically-charged, and reflective of socio-cultural and socio-economic climates, tends to be an extension of one's personal voice, it has the capacity to be accessible to people from all walks of life and students at varying levels.

There are multitudes of ways to relevantly introduce poetry into a curriculum. Utilization of prompts, response pieces to pre-existing and/or published work (contemporary or historical), collective and improvisational oral poetry ciphers²,

² See group writing sample from an improvised oral poetry cipher in a NYC Transfer School*

and stylistically specific poetry are only a few examples of how the poetic voice can be cultivated within the classroom. When facilitated to write and/or create collaboratively, students are invited to balance their individual aspirations with the interests of the group, thus developing trust and respect for each others' ideas, perspectives, and feedback. Media as a mechanism for self-expression may also be integrated into our approach to performance poetry, with the incorporation of the projected image, music, movement, tableaux, video, and soundscape to create a multi-sensory experience for the audience. As a tool for learning, facilitators may embed such contributions into their curriculum for students to experience, reflect upon, and respond to. Once these creative devices are made available to young voices, stories will be told. To invite a young person to lyrically and performatively revise or report upon their identity is revolutionary. Spoken word becomes a means by which our youth can document their perspectives, their dreams, and their life experiences—narrating their stories themselves—which offers a valuable sense of agency to a population that, demographically, is often marginalized.

Working with students who do not fit within—or thrive within—the standardized structures of learning, challenges the teacher to access avenues through which they can facilitate a sense of success and satisfaction. Poetry and creative expression are powerful outlets for students who may feel unheard or under-valued by their peers, their communities, society at large, or even within their families. One significant goal of the educator, especially in *Transfer Schools* which are primarily comprised of “over-age, under-credited” students—those most at risk for dropping out—is to help youth feel like they genuinely belong in the classroom. Transfer Schools are small, academically rigorous, full-time high schools designed to re-engage students who are behind in high school or have dropped out. The essential elements of Transfer Schools include: a personalized learning environment, rigorous academic standards, student-centered pedagogy, support to meet instructional and developmental goals, and a focus on connections to college.³ When approaching a population who has fallen so far behind in their academic achievements, it becomes the responsibility of the educator to re-engage students in a structure of learning that holds recuperative power.

It is our charge as educators to cultivate classrooms that invigorate and inspire our students. In striving to incorporate modalities of learning which are relevant to those we teach, we must consider the power of the word. Poetry—in all its forms from bebop to hip hop, from the rant to the romantic—legitimizes, validates, and upholds the cultures, visions, knowledge, experience, and histories of the young thinkers, leaders, and artists who comprise our communities. Working within the mode of creative expression through a poetic voice offers the opportunity for students to attain a sense of agency around their life stories and experiences, and provides tools for (re)gaining control, becoming the narrators of their own stories.

³ <http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/AlternativesHS/TransferHS/default.htm>

Within this paradigm, student becomes the subjects, as opposed to the objects, of their stories.

Below is an example of a lesson plan which was implemented within the context of an eight week poetry residency in a Brooklyn high school:

BROOKLYN READS LESSON PLAN

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WARM UP

1. COLLECTIVE COUNTING (5min)

Objective: to facilitate a focused environment, and allow students to discover collective strategies of nonverbal cooperation within an ensemble.

Standing in a circle—legs hip width apart, arms by sides, eyes closed, students are to count from 1-15 consecutively. No two students may say the same number at the same time. (The facilitator always says the number one and returns to the number one if any number is spoken by more than one voice). No pre-designated order or signals are allowed. This is an exercise in pacing, intuition, feeling the group's energy, listening to the unspoken signals in a body. Allow students to make suggestions. Common suggestions are “if you have said one number, don't say another; slow down; don't laugh or express frustration if we have to start over.

FROM THIS FOCUSED, COLLECTIVE SPACE, STUDENTS ARE INVITED TO FIND A SEAT AROUND THE LARGE TABLE.

INTRODUCTION

Brief discussion about this phase of the poetry residency, emphasizing the value of each student's voice. This residency exists because we recognize your power, and therefore we have invested time and resources into supporting your growth as artists and thinkers...

2. WHIP AROUND (3min)

PROMPT: Is the writing you have done so far in our time together during Brooklyn Reads a reflection of your greatest work or potential? (Careers and Life Long Learning-5 Strands of Learning)

This is an opportunity for students to assess their progress, efforts, and discipline throughout our time so far together, be their own evaluators, and set their own goals and standards.

MAIN ACTIVITY

3. **GRAFFITI BOARD** (with a focus on concrete and descriptive images)

*Objective: to collectively generate a springboard for individual creative writing. This activity promotes reflection on the students' world around them, their place in it and relationship to it (**Making Connections-5 Strands of Learning**)*

(10min)

Facilitator invites one student to call out the first word that comes to their mind, and records this word on the chalkboard. From this point forward, students are instructed to continue this out-loud free association exercise, keeping in mind that they must only respond to the most recent word offered. This is a group activity and does not require students to raise their hands or wait to be called on. At the same time, it demands attentive listening and mindfulness. Facilitator records all words on the board.

GRAFFITI BOARD FROM THIS LESSON:

Confess	Judge	Court
Trial	Jury	Jail
Break	Cardboard	Boxed in
Break-dance	People	Crowded
Degree	Fever	Sweat
Shiver	Love	Heart
Artery	Blood	Veins
Needle	Prick	Stab
Wound	Revenge	Boycott
Martin Luther King	Rosa Parks	Bus
Home	Love	Family
Utopia	Fairytale	Sweet
Success	Rich	Money
Poverty	Gutter	Shelter
Life	Education	Cafeteria
Chef	Hunger	Struggling
Pain	Sickness	Hope(less)
Lost	Scared	

4. **FREE-WRITE (15min)**

Students are then encouraged to incorporate as many words as possible from the board into a poem, story, rhyme, rap, letter, rant, song, or free-write. All words may be altered (ie: dream → dreaming, mother→motherhood).

(Artmaking-5 Strands of Learning)

**5. SHARE (WITH AN EMPHASIS ON CRITICAL REFLECTION)
(10min)**

Objective: To cultivate a safe environment in which students may develop confidence and public speaking/performance skills. To provide an outlet for young voices to both have the opportunity to hear one another and to be heard.

Each student will stand in the front of the class in the already established safe space for the performer, and deliver their free-write. At this stage in the residency we are focusing on projection, pacing, enunciation, and body language.

Students are prompted to engage as active listeners and pay attention to what grabs them. They are advised that they will be expected to respond constructively to each performance with feedback.

(Literacy in the Arts-5 Strands of Learning)

6. DEBRIEF and CLOSE (5min)

The following is a group writing sample from an improvised oral poetry cipher in a NYC Transfer School. It was preceded by the **Collective Counting** activity (described above). Following the counting activity, we engaged in another game called **Rhythm Leader** in which the students are seated in a circle and one student volunteers to be the *rhythm leader*. That student leads the rest of the class in a simple rhythm and the students are to mimic precisely what the leader does and when they change (ie: hands clapping to feet stomping). Once the rhythm is established, a student who has volunteered to be the *guesser* returns to the circle to try to guess who the leader is. These activities have been coupled in this lesson to support students in collaborative creation and problem solving. The goal of both of these exercises is to work together to accomplish one goal and to do so seamlessly—as though with one voice.

Once students successfully engaged in both warm up activities, they were instructed to create a collective *freestyle*. As the facilitator, I started them off with a prompt (which would become our fist line), and anyone could build on that first line to craft a group poem. As the poem progressed, I would continue to repeat the opening line, which became a cue to start back at the beginning. This repetition technique serves as a memorization tool. By the end of the workshop we had orally devised and memorized a powerful group poem.

Group Poem:

S: Color me invisible so I may walk with arm grenades in devil's shadows

A: Dark walls and lonely nights

K: Don't hold me against my will

S: Don't say I can't cause I know I will

T: Grenades of knowledge not the ones that kill

M: I'm a lost soul in a dark hole

T: My mind is the ocean that moves in motion with feelings and emotions

S: My flow is like a magic potion

S: Don't be afraid of my light

K: Be afraid of my darkness

M: For it will cover you whole

M: Still water runs deep with the secrets I keep

A: Secrets I keep steal me from sleep

R: Afraid to let go from the people I keep

M: You know I spit fire like the trio from the heat

T: Although the mountain is steep the success is the key

S: Nothing like the company you keep

J: I'm hurting inside I'm having trouble with sleep

T: But my goals are not shallow they are very deep

M: And nothing but success is what Imma seek

D: I'm the opposite of the grim reaper I'm a creep

M: So I resurrect in a new life form

S: Becoming the angels

M: Of a dark storm

E: Success is like gold

S: So I hold onto my goal

J: And I don't let go

R: Color me invisible cause when I hide no one seeks

D: Nobody gonna find you cause they can't see

S: The light that you keep while they retreat

M: I'm in my own movie running from defeat

R: Patiently waiting for happiness not grief

T: Although my feet is tired I can't take a seat

E: Success is like gold

S: So I hold onto my goal

R: A man walking in the shallow of death knees deep

The devil's pullin' at his feet

Can't people see shooting guns, selling crack to bums

Can put you in an eternal sleep

K: Diagnosed with insomnia so I'm awake to see my dreams

VI. Epilogue

At its best, poetry is relevant and lasting. Young people across the country are using spoken word to document their attitudes, opinions and personal histories, thereby claiming their rightful place in the literary continuum.

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Research and Writing Activities

I. The Harlem Renaissance

Suggested poems from the Harlem Renaissance

Countee Cullen “The Incident”

Langston Hughes “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”

Claude McKay “If We Must Die”

Paul Laurence Dunbar “We Wear the Mask”

Suggested writing activities for the Harlem Renaissance

Read Countee Cullen’s “The Incident.” Discuss with students the political awakening that occurred for the poet, at age eight, as a result of this incident. Have students write about a time when someone else’s behavior affected their view of the world.

Read Paul Laurence Dunbar’s “We Wear the Mask.” Discuss with students what types of masks African-Americans in Dunbar’s time would be expected to wear. Have students write about a time when they “wore a mask” or “put on” another face.

Ask students to choose a writer from the Harlem Renaissance, and describe present-day Harlem in the voice of their chosen writer.

Suggested research activities for the Harlem Renaissance

Explore how the political climate of America in the early 20th century influenced the work of Harlem Renaissance writers.

Write an essay comparing and contrasting the work of a Harlem Renaissance writer and a visual artist (i.e. Aaron Douglas, William Johnson, Jacob Lawrence)

of the same period.

Choose a musical form of the Harlem Renaissance (i.e. blues, jazz, etc) and trace its connection to a contemporary musical form.

II. The Beat Generation

Suggested poems from the Beat Generation

Diane DiPrima “April Fool Birthday Poem for Grandpa”

Lawrence Ferlinghetti “Constantly Risking Absurdity”

Allen Ginsburg “Cosmopolitan Greetings”

Suggested writing activities for the Beat Generation

Read Diane DiPrima’s “April Fool Birthday Poem for Grandpa.” Discuss the lessons DiPrima learned from her grandfather. Have students write a poem about a relative who has taught them an essential life lesson.

Read Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s “Constantly Risking Absurdity.” Discuss Ferlinghetti’s extended metaphor of the poet as an acrobat. Have students write a poem with one central extended metaphor.

Read Allen Ginsburg’s “Cosmopolitan Greetings.” Ask students if any of Ginsburg’s statements still seem true today. Have students create "a list poem" of all the things they believe to be universal truths.

Suggested research activities for the Beat Generation

Research the role of women on the male-dominated Beat culture.

Write a paper exploring Beat Poetry as a literary and social movement.

Choose a poet from the Beat Generation and a poet from the Harlem Renaissance. Write an essay comparing and contrasting their backgrounds and poetry.

III. The Black Arts Movement

Suggested poems from the Black Arts Movement

Amiri Baraka “Ka’Ba”

Gwendolyn Brooks “We Real Cool”

Nikki Giovanni “Nikki-Rosa”

Haki Madhubuti “My Brothers”

Quincy Troupe “The Day Duke Raised: May 24th, 1974”

Suggested writing activities for the Black Arts Movement

Read Gwendolyn Brooks’ “We Real Cool.” Discuss the contradiction between the pool players’ “cool” lifestyle and their early death. Have students write a poem about person or group of people who appear to be living well, but bear some

hidden pain.

Read Nikki Giovanni's "Nikki-Rosa." Discuss Giovanni's description of how the 'black experience' is viewed by others versus how she sees it. Have students write a poem about a bittersweet memory.

Read Quincy Troupe's "The Day Duke Raised: May 24th, 1974." Discuss the role nature plays in Troupe's poem. Discuss the impact of jazz music on the writers of the Black Arts Movement. Have students write a poem dedicated to a musician who inspires them.

Suggested research activities for the Black Arts Movement

The Black Arts Movement is often referred to as "a sister" to the Black Power Movement. Research and discuss the connection between the two social movements.

Choose a poet from the Black Arts Movement. Write an essay exploring how their writing has evolved from the 1960s to the present day.

Write an essay or poem about the influence of the Black Arts Movement on early hip hop artists.

IV. Hip Hop Poetry and Culture

Suggested poems for Hip-Hop Poetry and Culture

Tupac Shakur "The Rose That Grew From Concrete"

Willie Perdomo "Where I'm From"

Suheir Hammad "First Writing Since"

Steve Colman "I Want to Hear a Poem"

Suggested writing activities for Hip-Hop Poetry and Culture

Read Tupac Shakur's "The Rose That Grew From Concrete." Discuss different interpretations of what the rose in Shakur's poem represents. Have students write a poem that begins with the words "Did you hear..."

Read Willie Perdomo's "Where I'm From." Discuss Perdomo's use of the five senses. Have students write a poem about the place they are from. Encourage students to use words that create a vivid picture of their home.

Write a hip-hop themed haiku. Haiku is a Japanese form of poetry comprised of three lines. Traditionally the first line of a haiku has five syllables, the second line has seven syllables and third line has five syllables.

Suggested research activities for Hip-Hop Poetry and Culture

Choose a contemporary hip hop song and get a copy of the lyrics. Write an essay

describing the different poetic devices used in the song and how these tools help to effectively convey the writer's message.

Choose a poem by a poet from the Black Arts Movement and a song by a contemporary hip hop artist exploring the same theme (love, loss, happiness, etc.). Write an essay explaining how each writer explores the same subject.

Write an essay comparing and contrasting the rise of hip hop and the contemporary spoken word movement.

V. Literary Devices

Use the following literary devices to help your students create successful poems.

Alliteration - The repetition of the same sounds or of the same kinds of sounds at the beginning of words, i.e. "Funny frogs flipped furiously."

Metaphor – A figure of speech in which two unlike things are compared; does not use the words "like" or "as," i.e. "My room is a garbage can."

Onomatopoeia – A figure of speech, in which the sound of a word imitates the sound of the thing it represents, i.e. buzz, zoom, crackle.

Personification – A figure of speech in which a thing, quality or idea is represented as a person, i.e. "The sky wept tears of joy."

Rhyme - A corresponding sound, typically found at the end of a line of poetry, i.e. cool and school.

Simile – A figure of speech in which two unlike things are compared, using the words "like" or "as," i.e. "His brother is as annoying as a honking car horn."

VI. Questions

Before the Performance

What literary devices can we look for in a poem?

Which aspects of a spoken word performance might be difficult to translate on the page?

What are some similarities and/or differences between spoken word poetry and more traditional forms of poetry?

What are the similarities and differences between the performance of spoken word and hip hop?

How can a poet's "body language" help or hurt the message of their poem?

After the Performance

Where there any common themes in the work of the performers?

What performers inspired you and why?

What metaphors or similes did you notice?

Which poems would you like to read in a book?

Which poems are better experienced through a live performance?

What will you remember most about the performance?

After the Performance Activities

Write a poem inspired by the Poetry 2009: Expression in the Right Direction performance.

Hold a school-wide poetry slam.

Go to a poetry reading at a local venue.

Additional Resources

Poetry Venues

Visit the following websites for information on upcoming spoken word events, poetry slams and educational opportunities.

Nuyorican Poets Cafe
236 E. 3rd Street
New York, NY 10009
www.nuyorican.org

The world-renowned Nuyorican Poets Cafe is a forum for innovative poetry, music, hip hop, video, visual arts, comedy and theatre. The mission of the Cafe is to create a multi-cultural venue that both nurtures artists and exhibits a variety of artistic works.

Bowery Poetry Club
308 Bowery
New York, NY 10012
www.bowerypoetry.com

The Bowery Poetry Club is where poetry and art meet entertainment, technology and commerce. The Club sponsors poetry events every night, as well as workshops and readings in the afternoons.

louderMONDAYS
13 Bar | Lounge
35 East 13th Street, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10003
www.louderarts.com

The louderARTS Project presents one of the country's most diverse and respected poetry series: louderMONDAYS. The series provides a nurturing and challenging community for NYC artists while showcasing established and emerging poets.

Organizations

Urban Word NYC
242 W. 27th Street, Suite 3B

New York, NY 10001

(212) 352-3495

<http://www.urbanwordnyc.com/>

Urban Word NYC provides free creative writing, performance, spoken word, and hip-hop resources to teenagers in NYC.

Community-Word Project

42 Broadway, 18th Floor

New York, NY 10271

(212) 962-3820

<http://www.communitywordproject.org>

The Community-Word Project (CWP) is a New York City based arts-in-education organization that inspires children in underserved communities to read, interpret and respond to their world and to become active citizens through collaborative arts residencies and teacher training programs.

The Inspired Word

inspiredwordnyc.blogspot.com

Founded and produced by longtime journalist and former *Village Voice* columnist Mike Geffner, the Thursday night Inspired Word series features the best poets and spoken word artists in New York City.

The Acentos Foundation

www.acentosreview.com/Foundation_Introduction.html

The Acentos Foundation is a Bronx-based organization dedicated to the development, discussion, and dissemination of poetry and literature by Latino/a writers in New York and beyond.

Asian American Writers' Workshop

www.aaww.org

The Asian American Writers' Workshop is a national not-for-profit arts organization devoted to the creating, publishing, developing, and disseminating of creative writing by Asian Americans.

Cave Canem

www.cavecanempoets.org

Cave Canem is a home for the many voices of African American poetry and is committed to cultivating the artistic and professional growth of African American poets.

Kundiman

www.kundiman.org

Kundiman is dedicated to the creation, cultivation, and promotion of Asian American poetry.

Project V.O.I.C.E.

www.project-voice.net

Project V.O.I.C.E. encourages people, particularly teenagers, to use spoken word as a tool for understanding the world and self, and a medium for vital expression.

Poetry Slam Incorporated (PSI)

www.poetryslam.com

Poetry Slam Incorporated promotes the performance and creation of poetry while cultivating literary activities and spoken word events in order to awaken minds, foster education, inspire mentoring, encourage artistic statement and engage communities worldwide in the revelry of language. PSI's annual events include the National Poetry Slam, the Individual World Poetry Slam, and the Women of the World Poetry Slam.

Books

County of Kings

by Lemon Andersen

His Rib: Stories, Poems & Essays by Her

Edited by Mahogany L. Browne

Over the Anvil We Stretch

by Anis Mojgani

Pink Elephant

by Rachel McKibbens

Up Jump the Boogie

by John Murillo

The Spoken Word Revolution

by Mark Eleveld

Take the Mic: The Art of Performance Poetry, Slam, and the Spoken Word

by Marc Kelly Smith and Joe Kraynak

Word Warriors: 35 Women Leaders in the Spoken Word Revolution

by Alix Olson and Eve Ensler

Words in Your Face: A Guided Tour Through Twenty Years of the New York City Poetry Slam

by Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz

Aloud: Voices from the Nuyorican Poets Cafe
by Miguel Algarin (Editor), et al

Bum Rush the Page: A Def Poetry Jam
by Tony Medina (Editor) and Louis Reyes Rivera (Editor)

*Burning Down the House: Selected Poems from the Nuyorican Poets Cafe's
National Poetry Slam Champions*
by Roger Bonair Agard, et al

Listen Up: Spoken Word Poetry
by Zoe Angelsey (Editor)

Slam
by Cecily Von Ziegesar (Editor)

Where a Nickel Costs a Dime
by Willie Perdomo

My Words Consume Me: An Anthology of Youth Speaks Poets
by Various

Zaatar Diva
by Suheir Hammad

Book Publishers

Cypher Books
www.cypherbooks.org
Cypher Books is dedicated to publishing the most cutting edge poets from around the world.

PenManShip Books
www.penmanshipbooks.com
Created by writer and performance poet Mahogany L. Browne, PenManShip's purpose is to become the anchor for publishing performance poets and live artists with a huge fan base in the hard to crack literary world.

Write Bloody Press
www.writebloody.com
Write Bloody Press is a small press with a snappy look dedicated to quality literature. Write Bloody publishes and promotes great books of fiction, poetry, and art every year.

Spoken Word Film and DVD

Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry: Season 1-6 (2008)

The Peabody Award-winning HBO series created by Russell Simmons and featuring both established and emerging spoken word poets.

Russell Simmons Presents Brave New Voices (2009)

A seven-part HBO Series that followed youth slam teams from New York, San Francisco, Ft. Lauderdale, Ann Arbor, Hawaii, and Philadelphia as they prepared for a chance to compete at the 2008 Brave New Voices *National* Youth Poetry Slam Championship in Washington, DC.

Poetic License (2001) - directed by David Yanofsky

Documentary about the teen spoken word movement

SlamNation (1998) - directed by Paul Devlin

Documentary about the 1996 National Poetry Slam competition in Chicago

CDs

5 Past 13 (2003)

Verbal Fabric: Urban Word NYC Compilation (2003)

About BAM Education & Humanities

BAM Education is dedicated to bringing the most vibrant, exciting artists and their creations to student audiences. The department presents performances and screenings of theater, dance, music, opera, and film in a variety of programs. In addition to the work on stage, programs take place both in school and at BAM that give context for the performances, and include workshops with artists and BAM staff members, study guides, and classes in art forms that young people may never have had access to before. These programs include Shakespeare Teaches, AfricanDanceBeat, AfricanMusicBeat, Dancing into the Future, Young Critics, Young Film Critics, Brooklyn Reads, Arts & Justice, and our Screening programs, as well as topically diverse professional development workshops for teachers and administrators.

BAM Education also serves family audiences with BAMfamily concerts, the BAMfamily Book Brunch, and the annual BAMkids Film Festival. In addition, BAM Education collaborates with the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation to provide an arts and humanities curriculum to students who perform on stage in BAM's DanceAfrica program.

Humanities at BAM

BAM presents a variety of programs to promote creative thinking and ongoing learning. The Artist Talk series, in conjunction with mainstage programming, enriches audiences' experience during the Next Wave Festival and the Winter/Spring Season. The Iconic Artist Talk series, launched as part of BAM's 150th anniversary celebrations, features iconic artists and companies examining the evolution of their work at BAM over the years through on-screen projections of original footage and images from the BAM Hamm Archives.

In September 2012, BAM launched On Truth (and Lies), a series hosted by philosopher Simon Critchley that explores the ambiguity of reality with prominent artists and thinkers, as a co-presentation with the Onassis Cultural Center NY.

Humanities at BAM also include year-round literary programs: Unbound, a new fall series presented in partnership with Greenlight Bookstore that celebrates contemporary books and authors from across the literary spectrum, and the ongoing Eat, Drink & Be Literary series in partnership with the National Book Awards, in the spring.

The department also hosts master classes, including the Backstage Seminar, a series of workshops on the process of theater-making with BAM's production staff and guest artists.

Department of Education and Humanities Staff:

Stephanie Hughley: Vice President, Education and Humanities

Suzanne Youngerman, Ph.D.: Director

John P. Tighe, DMA: Assistant Director

Violaine Huisman: Humanities Director

John S. Foster, Ph.D.: Education Manager

Gwendolyn Kelso: Program Manager

Eveline Chang: Program Manager

Shana Parker: Event Manager

Jennifer Leeson: Administrative Coordinator

Nathan Gelgud: Box Office Manager/Program Associate

Tamar MacKay: Administrative Assistant

Molly Silberberg: Humanities Assistant

Rebekah Gordon: Administrative Assistant

Hannah Max: Humanities Intern

Lulu Earle: Education Intern

Major support for BAM Education programs provided by:



Major sponsor for Brooklyn Reads:



BNY MELLON

Poetry 2013: Game Changers is part of BAM Education's Brooklyn Reads program supported by Goldman Sachs Gives at the recommendation of David and Susan Marcinek, with additional support provided by the Emily Davie and Joseph S. Kornfeld Foundation.

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