

teacher resource guide

schooltime performance series



*the mayhem
poets*

arts
education
njpac
discover. create. grow.

about the performance

Poetry may seem like a rarefied art form to those who associate it with old books and long dead poets, but this is far from the truth. Today, there are many artists who are creating poems that are propulsive, energetic, and reflective of current events and issues that are driving discourse. The Mayhem Poets are injecting juice, vibe and jaw-dropping rhymes into poetry through their creatively staged performances. This troupe blends the raw elements of hip hop, theater, improv and stand-up comedy to tell gut-wrenching truths that leave audiences changed forever.

The New York Times has called the Mayhem Poets' performances as "an amazing ride" and described the experience as "*The Simpsons* meets Malcolm X at a Notorious B.I.G. concert."

The group has toured nationally and internationally at prestigious venues such as the Apollo Theater, Lincoln Center, New Victory Theater, New Jersey Performing Arts Center, and other stages – in addition to countless universities, schools, group homes and correctional facilities.



who are the mayhem poets

Scott Raven

Raven is a poet, writer, performer, teacher and co-founder of Mayhem Poets. He has a dual degree in acting and journalism from Rutgers University and is a member of the Screen Actors Guild. He has acted in commercials, plays and films, and performed for *Fiat*, *Purina*, *CNN* and *The Today Show*. He has been published in *The New York Times* and *New York Post*, and is the author of *Sconnetts*, *Beyond Sconnetts*, *The Polygons*, and *Sports Stories*. As a teacher, Raven has taught English and led workshops on various subjects.

Kyle Rapps

Rapps is a poetry slam artist, rapper, producer and co-founder of Mayhem Poets. As an award-winning poetry slam performer, his stage work has propelled him all the way to the Grand Slam finals at the legendary Nuyorican Poets Cafe in New York City. As a rapper, he has recorded with Action Bronson, Talib Kweli, KRS-One and Joell Ortiz. After touring for more than 10 years with Mayhem Poets, Rapps moved to Mexico City to spread the troupe's message across the border.

Mason Granger

Granger is a poet, host, producer and teaching artist who joined Mayhem Poets in 2005. He created SlamFind, the world's first mobile app dedicated to performance poetry, which allows poetry fans to discover and connect with poetry venues and poets throughout North America. SlamFind poetry videos were featured in *Huffington Post*, *Upworthy*, *Buzzfeed*, *Cosmopolitan* and many more. As a spokesperson for New Era Caps, Mason was featured in magazines such as *Vibe*, *Complex*, *Fader* and *Rolling Stone*. He is currently the Outreach Coordinator for Get Lit, an organization dedicated to fostering poetry and literacy in schools. He has previously served as executive director of Bowery Poetry and host for PoetNY Open Mic.

Mikumari Caiyhe

Caiyhe is an actor, emcee, spoken word poet, arts educator and advocate. A native of Washington, D.C., Caiyhe graduated from the Duke Ellington School for the Arts with a focus in theater and then completed his acting education at Rutgers University's Mason Gross School of the Arts. He was then cast as the lead actor in the musical *Revelations* while in London in the role of God/MC. He was one of the first emcees/rappers to perform a hip hop concert at Shakespeare's Globe and was a member of the Nuyorican Poets Cafe 2013 Competitive poetry team. Caiyhe has worked with New Jersey Performing Arts Center, the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, and the YMCA to facilitate residencies and workshops teaching literary arts, acting and ballroom dance.

in the spotlight

An Interview with Mayhem Poets

Tell us more about your company's history.

What prompted you to bring Mayhem Poets to the stage?

Mayhem Poets the touring group spun out of a poetry open mic at Rutgers University in the early-2000s called Verbal Mayhem, started by Scott Raven and Kyle Rapps. They teamed up with two other Verbal Mayhem regulars to form The Mayhem Poets and began performing in classrooms around New Jersey thru their own connections in the education realm. Those shows grew in popularity, enabling them to move up from classroom shows to full school assemblies. Along the way a new third member, Mason Granger, was added to the group, forming the core Mayhem Poets members who took the show even larger, performing not only in schools, but colleges and theaters nationally and internationally. The growth from campus open mic to international tour felt like a natural progression, like the real-life version of the saying, 'There's nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come.'

How do you capture the attention of young audiences, especially those who groan at the "Poets" in your name?

The word 'poets' is the perfect cover! You tell kids they're going to a poetry show, they're expecting to see old guys in black tights talking about the beauty of a flower (exactly what I thought when I went to my first poetry reading), then BAM – Mayhem Poets takes the stage and within the first five minutes of the show, everything they thought they knew about what poets are is tossed out the window and we got 'em.

Your performances are a fusion of hip hop, theater and improv comedy. Why do you think this is a successful approach?

The success of this approach has as much to do with the fact that those are things we enjoy ourselves as it does with those being popular art forms to put together. Sure, when you write them down on an advertisement, it piques their interest, but what makes it truly successful on stage is that it's not a marketing gimmick or three cogs slapped together to make a show. We love hip hop, so when we make art, hip hop will find its way in. Same with theater and same with improv. So really the success of the approach lies in the fact that it's a genuine reflection of who we are. The end result isn't a show that's one third this, one third that, and one third the other, but more of a whole show that's a seamless fusion of all three.

How does your professional training and experience inform your performances?

Experience has definitely been our most valuable training. Having toured and performed as The Mayhem Poets since 2004, we've pretty much seen it all at this point. Just as with anything, with experience and success comes confidence, and with confidence comes comfort and the ability to be completely in the moment throughout your performance. You can feel it during the show, the moment when the kids realize we're speaking to them instead of at them. That's when they really open up.

Tell us a little more about the "gut-wrenching truths that leave audiences forever changed."

Every single person's life on Earth has moments that are funny and serious, beautiful and ugly, easy and hard, etc. For many reasons, the average school setting simply isn't the place where the full range of these things can be addressed and confronted or spoken about fully. The beauty of theater in general, but especially in our show that's geared towards speaking to young people, is that we know how to go there, take you with us, and bring you back. Without fail, it's those moments in the show that both kids and adults remember most.

How would you like young audiences to approach poetry in the 21st Century?

We hope that young people come away from a Mayhem Poets show knowing that poetry is alive; not only in the sense of growing in popularity, but the art form itself is constantly growing, evolving and morphing just like everything else. If you ask a young person to name a TV show, they'll probably name 10 shows that are currently airing. Ask that same young person to name a poet, chances are they'll name someone between 80-800 years old. We want to show young people that poetry is not some archaic art form that 'used to happen,' but that it is happening today, every day, and all they need to get down with it is a pen and some paper.

What advice would you give to aspiring poets and performers?

Big picture advice: do whatever you want and don't think about whether you're doing it right. Smaller, more tangible advice: instead of posting statuses on social media whenever they come to you, write those clever/interesting snippets down in your notebook and try to turn them into poems later. There's obviously some sort of spark there that made you want to say it, so turn that spark into a full fire.

inspired ideas in the classroom

P

Prepare for the performance

If you have...
15 minutes: Introduce “snapping” and positive feedback. Play **Mayhem Poets Promo**. See student section for discussion prompts.
25 minutes: (above and) Play **A Short History of Spoken Word Poetry**. See student section for discussion prompts.
45 minutes: (above and) Play “If We Must Die” by Claude McKay. See student section for discussion prompts.

If you have...
15 minutes: When a poet performs and we hear something we like or vibe with, we snap. This is a form of positive feedback. Keep feedback 100% positive. [**Promo**] What did you like, notice or wonder about the video? Start your feedback with “I liked,” “I noticed,” and/or “I wonder.”
25 minutes: Be on the lookout for historical periods, people, and cultural styles! [**History**] What eras, people, and styles did you notice? What might we gain from reading the poetry from different eras and cultures? Based on your personal experience, what would you want another era, culture or generation to know about your experience?
45 minutes: (above and) : When you hear “Harlem Renaissance” what comes to mind? (jazz, dance, etc.) [**McKay**] What is the poem about? What did we learn about personal experience at the time of the Harlem Renaissance?

NJ Student Learning Standards

English Language Arts
NJLSLA.SL1., NJLSLA.SL2.
Social Studies
6.1.12.HistoryCC.8.c
Visual and Performing Arts
Anchor Standard #7-8

E

Experience the performance

Before the show: Engage students in a brief discussion on the different styles used by The Mayhem Poets. See student section for discussion prompts.
After the show: Give students a few minutes of reflection to journal first impressions and ideas (see prompts) for a share out.

Before the show: Look out for different styles in the performance - spoken word, hip hop, improv, and stand-up. Listen for themes.
After the show: Write down what resonated with you and anything that you would like to write about.
Share out: What did you like, notice, or wonder about the show?

English Language Arts
NJLSLA.SL2., NJLSLA.W4.
Visual and Performing Arts
Anchor Standard #8-9

R

Reflect, respond and read

Reflect: Dedicate some wall space for brainstorms and poet tools. Label a section as “Themes.” Create a list of themes from the show and add on new ideas.
Respond: Discuss emotional responses to themes. Connect topics from the Themes list to curriculum, culture and personal experience.
Read: Establish a “**Writing Toolbox**” section and generate a list of literary devices. Read poems to identify literary tools: “**truth**” by Gwendolyn Brooks; “**Spanglish**” by Tato Laviera; “**My Standard Response**” by Karenne Wood. **Discuss** how the tools were used and what the context of the poems might be.

Reflect: What themes were in the show? What could you write about?
Respond: Describe how certain parts of the show made you feel. Was it the theme, style, or both that evoked your response? What show themes remind you of specific subjects, events or life experiences?
Read: What literary devices have you learned about? What literary devices do we use when writing text? What tools do poets or rappers use? When reading poems, look out for the literary devices from our toolbox. Read the poems provided by your teacher. What writing techniques were used in the poems? What effect does each tool have? What is the social context of the poem?

English Language Arts
NJLSLA.R7., NJLSLA.SL1.
NJLSLA.SL2
Career Readiness, Life Literacies, and Key Skills
9.4.12.CI.1
Visual and Performing Arts
Anchor Standard #7, 8, 9, 11

F

Focus

Establish a “**Performance Toolbox**.” Generate a list of performance styles and techniques used by The Mayhem Poets. for additional tools. Watch slam poetry videos to identify the performance tools utilized. Discuss after each poem. “**Somewhere in America**” 2014; “**Slam Poem About Bullying**” 2017; “**What Kind of Asian Are You?**” 2013; “**Emmett**” 2015

What performance tools did The Mayhem Poets use? What techniques do hip hop artists use? Actors? Dancers? Singers? What techniques do you sometimes use to get your point across?
[“**Somewhere**”] Why do you think the poets spoke in unison at times? What other techniques were used?
[“**Bullying**”] What was different about this poem? How was rhythm used?
[“**What Kind**”] How did the poet use comedy? When did the poet’s tone turn from comedic to serious? What impact did that have?
[“**Emmett**”] What does this performance offer the audience that isn’t gained by reading an article about Emmet Till?

English Language Arts
NJLSLA.R7., NJLSLA.SL2.
Visual and Performing Arts
Anchor Standard #7-9

O

Originate

Establish small writing groups. Remind the class of the feedback process (see “Prepare” section). Assign a **writing warm up**. Groups may devise **crew names** and announce to class (snap or applaud to practice supporting each other). Invite groups to **choose a topic** from “Themes” as a cooperative group. Next, **brainstorm** as a group using a visual organizer to jot down your words, rhymes and personal connections to create your poem. (Use TRG Worksheet “Asked and Answered” for prompts.)
Option: Assign topics from curriculum to groups. After groups have a draft of their curriculum content poem, invite students to “Themes” to choose a topic for individual poems.

Take a few minutes to complete the **writing warm up**, and then share your writings within your group. Remember to use positive feedback. Next, **name your crew!** Announce your crew name to the class and remember to give props (respect) to the other groups. Next, **select a poem topic** from the “Themes” list. Find something that speaks to all of you, a message that everyone can stand behind. Use the worksheets to **brainstorm**. Include every idea! Even though all ideas won’t make it to the final poem, everything makes the final poem possible. Next, try creating a few lines or verses. Refer to the “Toolbox” lists for tools! Once the first draft is done, read it aloud. Edit and revise.

English Language Arts
NJLSLA.R7., NJLSLA.W4.
NJLSLA.W5., NJLSLA.SL1.
NJLSLA.SL2
Career Readiness, Life Literacies, and Key Skills
9.4.12.CI.1
Visual and Performing Arts
Anchor Standard #1, 2 ,3 5, 6

R

Rehearse

Determine **where** the performance will be. Set a **date** and **invite** your audience. Before students practice in front of each other, review positive feedback and remind students to applaud or snap after every performance. Practice group poems using strategies from the **Performance Toolbox**. Determine the order of the poems (**run of show**) and let students practice performing from the first poem to the last. Time the length of the show.

In your groups, determine who says what, unison, etc. Apply techniques from the “Performance Toolbox.” Practice reading your poem to establish flow. Once the flow feels right, add gestures and movement. When sharing feedback, always keep it 100% positive.

English Language Arts
NJLSLA.SL1., NJLSLA.SL2.
Career Readiness, Life Literacies, and Key Skills
9.4.12.CI.1
Visual and Performing Arts
Anchor Standard #2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10

M

Make magic

Determine staging area and prepare the performance space. If using mics (for sound or as props), allow poets to practice with them. Prep audience space. Do poets sit among the audience until they perform or separately? Introduce “snapping” and audience expectations with the incoming audience.
Option: Conduct a talk-back session with the feedback process of “I like, I notice, I wonder.”

You wrote your poetry. You did an **Amazing** job! Relax and have fun. We enjoy watching and hearing poets perform because we connect to their words and feelings. Congratulations on giving a new audience an opportunity to *connect* with you and your message!

English Language Arts
NJLSLA.SL1., NJLSLA.SL2.
Visual and Performing Arts
Anchor Standard #5-9

curriculum standards

New Jersey Student Learning Standards Visual & Performing Arts Standard

Artistic Process: Creating

Anchor Standard #1: Generating and conceptualizing ideas.

Anchor Standard #2: Organizing and developing ideas.

Anchor Standard #3: Refining and completing products.

Artistic Process: Performing/Presenting/Producing

Anchor Standard #4: Selecting, analyzing, and interpreting work.

Anchor Standard #5: Developing and refining techniques and models or steps needed to create products.

Anchor Standard #6: Conveying meaning through art.

Artistic Process: Responding

Anchor Standard #7: Perceiving and analyzing products.

Anchor Standard #8: Interpreting intent and meaning.

Anchor Standard #9: Applying criteria to evaluate products.

Artistic Process: Connecting

Anchor Standard #10: Synthesizing and relating knowledge and personal experiences to create products.

Anchor Standard #11: Relating artistic ideas and works within societal, cultural, and historical contexts to deepen understanding.

English Language Arts

NJSLSA.R7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

NJSLSA.W4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

NJSLSA.W5. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

NJSLSA.SL1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

NJSLSA.SL2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Social Studies

6.1.12.HistoryCC.8.c: Identify the conditions that gave rise to the Harlem Renaissance and assess the impact of artists, writers, and musicians on American culture.

Career Readiness, Life Literacies, and Key Skills

9.4.12.CI.1: Demonstrate the ability to reflect, analyze, and use creative skills and ideas.

FIND THE STANDARDS

For more detailed information on the standards, visit these websites:

NJ ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

[state.nj.us/education/cccs/2016/ela](https://www.nj.gov/education/cccs/2016/ela)

NJ SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

<https://www.nj.gov/education/cccs/2020/2020%20NJSLS-SS.pdf>

NJ STUDENT LEARNING STANDARDS– VISUAL & PERFORMING ARTS

<https://www.nj.gov/education/cccs/2020/2020%20NJSLS-VPA.pdf>

NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS

www.nationalartsstandards.org

cultural connections



Poetry's Roots to Now

Scholars have surmised that the earliest poems were delivered orally in order for people to remember stories and lessons and pass them on to the next generation. Oral poems have been found in every culture on the planet, from the Ancient Greeks to Africa. One of the earliest, historians note, is Homer's *The Iliad*, an epic Greek poem that depicts the Trojan War.

From an oral art form, poetry evolved rapidly in many civilizations over the centuries. As literacy grew, human ingenuity made it possible to record poems in written form. An example of this is the ancient clay tablets that contain the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. (The tablets themselves date back to 18th century B.C.E. Mesopotamia.)

This poem is about a ruler named Gilgamesh who lived in Ancient Sumer and figures prominently in Mesopotamian mythology and legends.

From clay tablets of Mesopotamia to poems handwritten on parchment (untanned animal skins) and then to paper, people recorded and preserved poetry in various ways, reflecting advances in technology. With the advent of the printing press in 1440 in Germany, poems could be printed multiple times and bound in books, making it a more popular and accessible art form than ever before. From aristocrats to common folks, poetry belonged to everybody.

In the mid-20th century, popular poetry returned to its oral roots with the rise of the spoken word form. This

poetry form first came about in the 1960s with rise of The Last Poets, a group of poets and musicians who drew inspiration from the civil rights movement and the push for black pride. The group is associated with the Black Arts Movement, a cultural phenomenon that centered on uplifting African Americans in the arts in the 1960s and 1970s. Gil Scott-Heron, the noted spoken word poet, was inspired to start his career when he heard The Last Poets' performance. Heron's best-known work is the seminal poem, "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised."

Spoken word, in turn, influenced hip hop and vice versa. Hip Hop was born in the 1970s when DJ Kool Herc, its founding father, would play records and prolong the breaks on two turntables while an emcee would sing and chant rhymes over the music. This art form has since taken over popular culture and remains the top music genre today.

Poetry continues to find massive audiences through spoken word open mic events, poetry slam competitions and, of course, on social media platforms such as Instagram, Tumblr, Twitter and TikTok. The best-selling poet Rupi Kaur has become an internet sensation by sharing her evocative and emotionally-touching poems on Instagram.

cultural connections

“But [Baraka’s] champions and detractors agreed that at his finest he was a **powerful voice** on the printed page, a **riveting orator** in person and an **enduring presence** on the international literary scene whom — whether one loved or hated him — it was seldom possible to ignore.”

—The New York Times

Amiri Baraka, Newark’s Voice

When it comes to literature, poetry, activism, and Newark, Amiri Baraka has an outsized presence. Learning about Baraka’s work and his life is essential to understanding important artistic trends that have left fingerprints on contemporary culture.

Amiri Baraka was born in Newark on October 7, 1934 as Everett Leroy Jones. His mother was a social worker and his father worked for the United States Postal Service. He studied at Rutgers University and then Howard University. It was during this time at Howard that he changed the spelling of his name to LeRoi, a sort of remembrance of Vincent Lushington “Roi” Ottley, a notable African American journalist and writer.

He then signed up to join the Air Force, a move he said he would later regret. But he used his time in the service, a total of three years, to read vast amounts of books on literature, philosophy and history. Some of his favorites were James Joyce, Fyodor Dostoevsky and Evelyn Waugh.

After leaving the Air Force, Jones settled in the Greenwich Village area of New York City and became involved with the Beat Generation poetry scene and befriended some of its luminaries, such as Allen Ginsberg. He wrote poetry and started his own literary magazines and a small publishing company.

During a trip to Cuba in 1960, Jones’ exposure to writers from developing countries made him more political and sparked a hunger that would lead to some of his most seminal works. His acclaimed 1964 play, *The Dutchman*, provided Jones with greater prominence as well as awards. The plot of the experimental and allegorical

play discussed black and white relations and sparked both controversy and chatter.

After his newfound fame, Jones kept writing plays, poetry, essays, and books in addition to teaching at prestigious institutions such as Yale and Columbia.

Another important inflection point in Jones’ life was the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965. This death galvanized him into changing many parts of life, including leaving his then wife Hettie Jones, moving to Harlem, and starting a theater troupe and school. After a time, Jones also converted to Islam, made Newark, NJ his permanent home base, and changed his name to Amiri Baraka. He held radical views, pushed for big progressive changes in policy and arts, and advocated for disenfranchised groups.

Amiri Baraka died in 2014 at the age of 79. His critics called him polarizing and controversial figure, alluding to his past black nationalistic views and some writings that have been described to be anti-semitic or misogynistic. He helped push the 1960s/1970s Black Arts Movement, which attempted to translate black power politics into the arts. Baraka toured all over the world reciting his poetry to a musical accompaniment, reminiscent of beatnik past. He also loved jazz and some of his earlier writings, especially the work *Blues People*, helped establish jazz studies as a serious discipline.

The New York Times wrote in his 2014 obituary: “But [Baraka’s] champions and detractors agreed that at his finest he was a powerful voice on the printed page, a riveting orator in person and an enduring presence on the international literary scene whom — whether one loved or hated him — it was seldom possible to ignore.”

vocabulary

Poetry

A piece of writing or literary work that attempts to distill in an imaginative way experiences, thoughts and emotions. Poets – or the practitioners of the art of poetry – compose choice words into specific, artfully put together arrangements, which often have rhythm and rhyme. At times, poems don’t have rhyming words in them. This type of poem is called blank verse, but it has a certain rhythm in how the words are composed. Poems are often created to evoke emotional responses or reveal profound, hidden truths on a variety of subjects.

Rhyme

In the context of poems, rhyme is when two or more words have corresponding similar sounds, such as hat and cat, mouse and house, pink and link, etc. Basic poems have ending rhymes where the last words or syllables in two or more lines of poetry rhyme with each other. An example would be Robert Frost’s poem, “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening.” “Whose woods these are I think I know / His house is in the village, though / He will not see me stopping here / To watch his woods fill up with snow.”

Rhythm

In the context of poetry, rhythm is the beat, pattern or cadence in a poem. It can be heard or read as a type of movement or repetition in the way the words and syllables are put together. In music, rhythm basically has the same definition but with musical notes as the ingredients of any piece.

Hip Hop

Hip hop is both a musical genre and artistic, cultural movement that traces its roots to big block parties in the Bronx, New York in the 1970s. As a cultural phenomenon, it is made up of rapping, deejaying, beatboxing, breakdancing and graffiti. In music, the hip hop genre features stylized rhythmic music with rapping, a rhythmic and rhyming speech that is chanted by an emcee/MC.

Spoken Word

Poetry intended for onstage performance, rather than exclusively designed for the page. While often associated with hip hop, it also has strong ties to storytelling, modern poetry, postmodern performance, and monologue theatre.

Poetry Slam

A competition where spoken word poets recite poems in front of judges and a lively audience.



writing toolbox

Acronyms

are letter abbreviations for proper names and common phrases. (Text messaging has made acronyms a big part of our language.) Spoken-word poets sometimes create their own versions of existing acronyms. For example: Laugh Out Loud (lol).

Alliteration

uses words that are next to or near each other that begin with the same letter or sound. For example: Curiosity killed the cat.

Antithesis

(an-TITH-uh-siss)
contrasts opposite ideas in similar words. For example: It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.

Clichés

An expression, idea, or element of an artistic work that has become overused. For example: For example: The apple doesn't fall far from the tree

Hyperbole

(hi-PER-bo-lee)
is a greatly exaggerated statement that is not meant to be taken literally. For example: I have a ton of homework!

Onomatopoeia

(on-a-mott-a-PEE-a)
is using a word that sounds like the thing it describes. For example: buzzing bee, ding-dong bell.

Oxymoron

puts together two ideas that seem to contradict each other. For example: you have to be cruel to be kind.

Personification

gives a thing or idea human qualities or abilities. For example: lightning danced across the sky.

Pop-Culture References

Take several well-known names, characters, titles, etc. and put them together by free association.

Puns

are another technique for playing with words that have multiple meanings. For example: Lord of the Ringmaster

Similes and Metaphors

are figures of speech that directly compares two things. Similes differ from metaphors by highlighting the similarities between two things using words such as “like”, “as”, or “than”, while metaphors create an implicit comparison. For example: Brave as a lion (simile) or he is a shining star (metaphor).

Writing Checklist

Rhyming and rhythm

- ☐ Used rhyme where appropriate.
- ☐ Varied rhyme scheme and used slant rhymes.
- ☐ Used internal rhyme.
- ☐ Used alliteration.

Alternate ways of putting words together

- ☐ Used inventive acronyms.
- ☐ Took clichés and changed them around.
- ☐ incorporated pop-culture references.
- ☐ Used puns, wordplay, etc.

Personal connection to poems

- ☐ Created personal connections.
- ☐ Combined personal connection with imaginative/creative concepts/ideas.

performance toolbox

Enunciation

Poets pronounce their words clearly and distinctly. They often use tongue twisters as a warm-up to loosen their lips and mouth.

Eye Contact and Focus

Poets make eye contact with their audience or with other poets while performing to connect, interact, and feed off the energy in the space. It also helps the audience and the poet focus on the piece.

Memorization

Poets commit their piece to memory and learn their poem by heart. Some memorization tips are to rewrite your poem by hand several times, read your poem aloud before going to sleep at night, and repeat it when you wake up, and practice your poem in front of your family and friends.

Physicalizing

When a poet puts a movement or gesture to the words to help the audience better understand and relate to your story.

Syllable/Word Stressing

Practice your lines out loud, emphasizing different syllables and words, using different vocal inflections and stresses.

Voice Projection

Poets project their voice nice and loud when they practice and perform so that the audience can hear what they have to say.

Warm-Up

Poets warm-up their voices and bodies before a slam or performance so that they are mentally, physically, and emotionally ready to give it their best.

Performance Checklist

Using voice to its full capacity

- ☐ Enunciated clearly and sustained energy throughout.
- ☐ Stressed punchlines when appropriate.
- ☐ Projected so everyone could hear.
- ☐ Paid attention to timing, pacing, and rhythm.

Using body to enhance performance

- ☐ Incorporated gestures and movement.
- ☐ Had poem memorized so hands were free and the body open.

Connecting with an audience

- ☐ Looked at the audience while performing.
- ☐ Fed off the audience's energy throughout.
- ☐ Stayed focused during disruptions and took in the unexpected.

Overall performance of poem

- ☐ Used several performance tactics throughout.
- ☐ Used own unique, distinctive voice.
- ☐ Took the audience on a journey from beginning to end.

resources

Websites

The Mayhem Poets
mayhempoets.com

Scott Raven
scotttraven.wordpress.com

Kyle Rapps
facebook.com/kylerrappsmusic

Mason Granger
masongranger.com

Mikumari Caiyhe
instagram.com/mikumari_caiyhe/?fbclid=IwAR0FpxqwPubausp-1SyLC-3jDPWsUa5frWrPJ9tqb-jcT3Qzn83WJQQuk

Spoken Word Poetry on Ted
blog.ted.com/10-spoken-word-performances-folded-like-lyrical-origami

Spanglish by Tato Laviera
poetryfoundation.org/poems/58198/spanglish

Truth by Gwendolyn Brooks
poetryfoundation.org/poems/54810/truth-56d2359ad24ba

My Standard Response by Karenne Wood
poetryfoundation.org/poems/147117/my-standard-response

Videos

The Mayhem Poets Performances
youtube.com/watch?v=vWiGbN9ZjHA
youtube.com/watch?v=paxdcGEYM80
youtube.com/watch?v=BW2Z-IBuaa8
youtube.com/watch?v=UBKivbSAWgg

Spoken-Word Poet Rudy Francisco Performs His Poem “Rifle”
youtube.com/watch?v=t3F0FfNiFss

Neil Hilborn - “OCD” Spoken Word Poem
youtube.com/watch?v=vnKZ4pdSU-s

Spoken word: The roots of poetry
youtube.com/watch?v=G9qaVXE30FU&t=18s

Become a slam poet in five steps - Gayle Danley
youtube.com/watch?v=9f8VcV8v2LE

Beau Sia Asian Invasion on HBO Def Poetry Jam
youtube.com/watch?v=diNLPGHZbGM

Changing the World, One Word at a Time!
A clip from The Queen Latifah Show
youtube.com/watch?v=YshUDA10JYY&feature=youtu.be

Slam Poem about Bullying
youtube.com/watch?v=eAa2wyliDoM&feature=youtu.be

“What Kind of Asian Are You? Alex Dang
youtube.com/watch?v=uKAFQF19cil&feature=youtu.be

Brave New Voices (Finals) – “Emmett” by Philadelphia Team
youtube.com/watch?v=RrizMMiBbBY&feature=youtu.be

Books

The Rap Year Book: The Most Important Rap Song From Every Year Since 1979, Discussed, Debated, and Deconstructed
By Shea Serrano, Arturo Torres, Ice-T
Abrams Image (October 13, 2015)

Can’t Stop Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation
By Jeff Chang
Picador (December 27, 2005)

When the Beat Was Born: DJ Kool Herc and the Creation of Hip Hop (Coretta Scott King - John Steptoe Award for New Talent)
By Laban Carrick Hill and Theodore Taylor III (Illustrator)
Roaring Brook Press (August 27, 2013)

Take the Mic (A Poetry Speaks Experience)
By Marc Smith
Sourcebooks MediaFusion (April 1, 2009)

The Spoken Word Revolution: Slam, Hip Hop & the Poetry of a New Generation (A Poetry Speaks Experience)
By Mark Eleveld
Sourcebooks MediaFusion; Revised ed. edition (March 1, 2005)

Word Warriors: 35 Women Leaders in the Spoken Word Revolution
By Alix Olson
Seal Press (October 5, 2007)

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the arts in your school

In-School Residencies: Residencies: NJPAC teaching artists come right to your school—online—to teach the performing arts to your students. Our super-flexible virtual residencies are designed to meet your needs, and you'll have a dedicated program manager to help you every step of the way. It's the perfect program to keep your students creating, connecting and expressing themselves through the magic of the arts.

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study the arts at njpac

Saturday Programs: NJPAC's Saturday programs are geared towards students at every level—from those who dream of starring on Broadway to those who are still learning their scales. Students work with professional artists to build technique and develop their own creative style in hip hop, jazz, devised theater and symphonic band.

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For more information or to schedule an appointment, please email our education sales team at artseducation@njpac.org. Visit njpac.org/education

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