

njpac

arts
education

schooltime performance series



young artist day

teacher resource guide

DODGE
POETRY

about the show

Young Artist Day at the *Dodge Poetry Festival* is a free day of poetry for high school students, held Friday, October 16, 2026, at NJPAC and partner venues across downtown Newark. Founded by the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation and now produced by NJPAC, the *Dodge Poetry Festival* is one of the largest poetry events in North America. Young Artist Day introduces teenagers to diverse poets who use words as a tool to effect social change, through readings, conversations and performances with national legends and exciting emerging voices. Students travel between venues including NJPAC's Prudential Hall and Victoria Theater, the Robert Treat Hotel, Trinity & St. Philip's Cathedral, First Baptist Peddie Memorial Church and Express Newark. This year's Friday lineup includes Naomi Shihab Nye, Danez Smith, Terrance Hayes, Tyehimba Jess, Aja Monet, José Olivarez, Evie Shockley and the New Jeru Slam Team. At 11AM, every venue hosts its own edition of "Griots, Troubadours and MCs: Poetry and the Oral Tradition," connecting today's spoken word to storytelling traditions that stretch back centuries. Students leave with new voices in their ears and, we hope, a few lines of their own.



cultural connections

Long before poems were printed in books, they lived in the voice. In the Mande cultures of West Africa, griots (also called jeli) have served for centuries as historians, genealogists, musicians and advisors, carrying the memory of entire communities through song and recitation, often accompanied by the kora, a 21-string harp. In medieval southern France, troubadours composed lyric poems about love, honor and politics that were sung aloud at court and passed from performer to performer. In the 1970s, young people in the Bronx created hip hop, and the MC became a new kind of poet, rhyming over beats to tell the truth about their neighborhoods.

These traditions share a belief that words are meant to be heard and that the poet has a responsibility to the community. That belief runs through the Harlem Renaissance, when Langston Hughes shaped the rhythms of blues and jazz into poetry. His poem "Harlem" asks what happens to a dream deferred, a question that gives one of this year's Young Artist Day sessions its title. It continues through the Black Arts Movement, led in part by Newark's own Amiri Baraka, through the Nuyorican Poets Café on New York's Lower East Side, and through the poetry slams that began in Chicago in the mid-1980s and spread around the world.

Two poets featured at this year's festival show how wide this tradition has grown. Naomi Shihab Nye, a Palestinian American poet who served as the Young People's Poet Laureate, writes about everyday kindness, family and the connections between cultures. Danez Smith, a poet from St. Paul, Minnesota writes and performs work that celebrates Black and queer lives and refuses to let them be erased. Jessica Jacobs, the founder and Executive Director of Yetzirah, an organization dedicated to Jewish poetry. Their styles are very different, yet all three treat poetry as a way of paying attention to people who might otherwise go unseen. At Young Artist Day, riot, the troubadour, and the MC, they have stories only they can tell, and a community that needs to hear them.

vocabulary

Allusion

A brief reference to a well-known person, place, event or text. The session title "What Happens to a Dream Deferred?" is an allusion to Langston Hughes

Art for social change

Creative expression that questions or challenges norms, often created in response to social movements

Erasure poem

A poem made by blacking out or removing most of an existing text so the remaining words form a new work; also called blackout poetry

Griot

A West African storyteller, historian and musician who preserves a community's history through spoken word and song

Imagery

Language that appeals to the five senses to help the reader see, hear, smell, taste or feel an experience

Line break

The place where a poet ends one line and begins the next, used to control pace, create pauses and add emphasis

MC

Short for "master of ceremonies;" in hip hop, the artist who writes and performs rhymes over a beat

Metaphor

A comparison between two unlike things that does not use "like" or "as" (e.g., "He is an open book")

Oral tradition

Passing stories, history and knowledge from generation to generation through speech and song rather than writing

Poetry

A form of artistic expression that uses language to evoke emotion, paint vivid imagery and convey complex ideas

Slam poetry

A competitive form of performance poetry in which poets perform original work and are scored by audience judges

Spoken word

Poetry written to be performed aloud, emphasizing rhythm, voice and the connection between poet and audience

Stanza

A group of lines arranged together in a poem, similar to a paragraph in prose

Tone

The writer's attitude toward the subject or reader (e.g., joyful, angry, ironic, tender)

Troubadour

A poet-musician of medieval southern France who composed and sang lyric poems, often about love and honor

inspired learning for the classroom

Teacher Focus		Student Activity	NJ Student Learning Standards	
P	Prepare	Introduce your students to their field trip by discovering what they already know about this art form, topic or type of performance. Then explain more fully what they will see at the theater and why it’s important. This can be accomplished by sharing images, vocabulary, videos, or context that might help them appreciate the performance more fully.	Read the definition of poetry in the vocabulary list and discuss: What does poetry sound like? Which poets do you already know? Watch Melissa Kovacs’ TED Talk “What makes a poem ... a poem?” Then read Naomi Shihab Nye’s poem “Kindness” aloud twice, with two different readers. Discuss: How did hearing it in a different voice change it? Finally, browse the Young Artist Day program and circle one session and one poet to look up before the trip.	NJSLSA.SL1 NJSLSA.SL2 RL.9–10.10 NCAS Anchor 7
E	Experience	For some students, this may be their first time in a theater. Review audience etiquette and go over expectations for arrival and departure from the theater. Before watching the show, provide a discussion question for them to consider during the performance.	Review your group, chaperone, festival map and schedule. In poetry spaces, audiences often snap instead of clapping when a line lands. Enter and exit sessions quietly. During one session, complete Activity Sheet 1 and keep these questions in mind: 1. Which line or image stayed with you and why? 2. How did the poet’s voice, pace or body change the meaning of the words? 3. What did the poet want the audience to feel, question or do?	NCAS Anchor 7 SEL Social Awareness NJSLSA.SL2 RL.TS.11–12.4
R	Reflect	As a class, discuss the prompt from the previous section. Then have students reflect on the skill set of the performers they saw in the show. Go around the class and have each student fill in the following statement: I can already _____ like the performers did, but I can’t _____ yet. Their response can be about the performers themselves, the characters they represented, or another element they appreciated from the trip. After everyone is done, remind them that with enough time and practice, they can accomplish anything they set their minds to. After reflecting together, give students the chance to reflect privately by free-form writing or responding to a prompt.	Share your answers to the three Experience questions and complete: “I can already ____ like the poets did, but I can’t ____ yet.” Then free-write for 10 minutes. <i>What story from your family, neighborhood, or culture deserves to be remembered, and what might be lost if no one writes it down?</i> Optional: Look up one of the poets on the Poets.org site and note one choice the poet makes that you want to try.	NJSEL Self-Awareness 1 L.VI.9–10.4 RL.CI.9–10.2 NCAS Anchor 7
F	Focus	Have students do research and activity sheets that focus on one of the following elements: The Artist: How did the life experience of the artist influence their work? The Form: What is the history and significance of this specific style of art? The History: What is there to learn about the time period, culture, social movement, or place this performance references? Before they begin, have students list 2 – 3 things they hope to learn during their research.	Choose one focus and list 2 – 3 things you hope to learn. The Artist: Research Naomi Shihab Nye, Danez Smith, Jessica Jacobs, or another poet you heard on Friday. How did their life shape their work? The Form: Trace the oral tradition from the griot to the troubadour to the MC and the slam poet. What has stayed the same? The History: Explore Langston Hughes’ “Harlem” and the Harlem Renaissance, or the Black Arts Movement in Newark. What “dreams deferred” did poets write about then, and now? Complete Activity Sheet 2.	NCAS Anchor 10 NJSLSA.W7 NJSLSA.SL2 RL.CI.9–10.2
O	Originate	The Artist: Have students reflect on their own life and what art could be inspired from their experience. Have them decide which art form they will use to tell their life story, and begin the brainstorming process. The Form: Have students create a work of art using the same form they saw in the performance about any topic of their choice. The History: Have students choose a social movement that is important to them and create a work of art in any form they choose to express their opinion on that movement.	Using Activity Sheet 2, draft a poem. The Artist: Write about a memory or future moment only you could tell. The Form: Write a spoken-word piece meant to be heard, using repetition and rhythm. The History: Write a poem in conversation with a movement or a “dream deferred” in your community. Optional: write a paragraph first, then add line breaks to shape it into a poem.	W.NW.9–10.3 L.KL.9–10.2 NJSLSA.W4 9.4.12.CI.1
R	Rehearse	Give students time to continue developing their creation. If time allows, let them develop their projects on their own, then break the class out into small groups to discuss their ideas and receive additional ideas from peers. As they are working, use this time to walk around and ask them each about their project, the materials they are using and what inspired them.	Read your draft aloud and revise for sound: Where should you pause? Which word needs weight? Share with a partner and ask: Which line landed hardest? Where did you lose me? Revise, then practice your delivery, paying attention to pace, volume and eye contact.	NJSLSA.W5 SL.PE.11–12.1 L.KL.9–10.2
M	Mix it all together!	Once everyone is done, come to an agreement as a class on how it would be best to share what everyone’s been working on. Allow each student to present their work, discussing their research and what inspired them. Remind students to be respectful of one another. Between presentations, allow 2 – 3 students to describe their reactions to the work that was presented. Encourage them to use phrases like “It reminded me of _____” or “It made me feel _____” rather than describing the project as good or bad.	Hold a classroom poetry reading set up like a festival venue. Poets may read aloud or post their work for classmates. Audiences snap for lines that resonate and respond with “It reminded me of ____” or “It made me feel ____.”	CAS Anchor 6 NCAS Anchor 10 SL.ES.11–12.3 NJSEL Relationship Skills

curriculum standards

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.

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.W7.
Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects, utilizing an inquiry-based research process, based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

RL.9–10.10.
By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems at grade level text-complexity or above with scaffolding as needed.

RL.CI.9–10.2.
Determine one or more themes of a literary text and analyze how it is developed and refined over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

RL.TS.11–12.4.
Evaluate the author’s choices concerning the structure and the effectiveness of specific parts of a text and how they contribute to its overall structure and meaning, as well as its aesthetic impact.

L.VI.9–10.4.
Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings, including connotative meanings.

L.KL.9–10.2.
Apply knowledge of language to make effective choices for meaning, or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading, writing, speaking or listening.

W.NW.9–10.3.
Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

SL.PE.11–12.1.
Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with peers on grades 11 – 12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

SL.ES.11–12.3.
Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.

National Core Arts Standards

Anchor Standard 6.
Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

Anchor Standard 7.
Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Anchor Standard 10.
Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

Career Readiness, Life Literacies, and Key Skills

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

Social-Emotional Learning (NJ SEL Competencies)

Self-Awareness: Recognize one’s feelings and thoughts. Social Awareness: Demonstrate an awareness of the expectations for social interactions in a variety of settings. Relationship Skills: Establish and maintain healthy relationships.

additional resources

NJPAC and Dodge Poetry

[Young Artist Day at Dodge Poetry Festival](#)
[Dodge Poetry at NJPAC](#)
[NJPAC Arts Education](#)
[NJPAC Teacher Resources](#)
[Dodge Poetry on YouTube](#)

Featured Poets

[“Kindness” by Naomi Shihab Nye](#)
[Naomi Shihab Nye, poems and biography](#)
[Danez Smith, poems and biography](#)
[“Harlem” by Langston Hughes](#)
[Amiri Baraka, biography](#)

Websites

[Poetry and Literature | Library of Congress](#)
[Glossary of Poetic Terms | Poetry Foundation](#)
[Common Literary Devices | Strive Academics](#)
[Poems of Protest, Resistance and Empowerment | Poetry Foundation](#)
[Protest Poetry | Academy of American Poets](#)
[“The Benefits of Poetry Reading” | Iowa Reading Research Center](#)
[“Found Poems: Creating Poems from Words Around Us” | University of British Columbia](#)
[Poetry Out Loud](#)
[Youth Speaks](#)

Videos

[“What Makes a Poem ... A Poem?” | Melissa Kovacs TED Talk](#)
[“Ode to a Rat” by Elizabeth Acevedo](#)
[“My Honest Poem” by Rudy Francisco](#)
[“The Nutritionist” by Andrea Gibson](#)
[“I am Twenty-Two” by Tonya Ingram](#)

bring the arts to your school

In-School Residencies

NJPAC teaching artists come right to your school to teach the performing arts to your students. Our super-flexible in-person 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.

Professional Development

Calling all educators! Expand your teaching skills, deepen your curriculum and give yourself a creative boost in NJPAC's forward-thinking professional development workshops. Our virtual PD programs are for teachers all the way from pre-K to high school and include hip hop, dance, storytelling, theater, music and more. Not only will you learn something... you'll also have fun and be inspired.

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For more information or to schedule an appointment,
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Or visit njpac.org/education

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