

Poetry in Your Classroom

A Lesson Plan for Grades 7 to 12

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Overview

One of the most effective ways to get students excited about poetry is to invite a spoken word artist into your classroom. It's a great way to make poetry come alive. Much of what happens on a poetry stage is not recorded, but spoken word videos can give students a sense of what it can feel like to be in the room with a poet giving a live performance.

You can use the lesson below to show students how to use their voices and bodies to tell their stories and share their thoughts, and imaginings. There are 5 videos of spoken word artists performing a poem here that can serve as an example to prepare your students for a poet's visit. They can also be used to follow up on a poet's visit and build on what they shared.

The links and leading questions provided are to facilitate students' learning on this subject. The framing for the lesson is highlighted in the introduction and the guiding questions are outlined for each video. While this lesson could be done in an hour, if needed, using each of the conversation questions and writing prompts could easily stretch it to 2 hours.

You may find that some of the conversations arising from the spoken word poems will challenge your students to think or feel something. Give time as needed to debrief after each poem before moving to the next one. Let the students lead the reflection conversation after watching the poems. The idea is to spark interest and wonder in spoken word poetry, not to dissect the poems for the poet's intentions.

Introduction

Spoken word poetry uniquely combines poetry and performance to make what a poet says come alive. Poets use their voices and bodies to make this happen. Spoken word is a form of performance art that has its roots in Black and Indigenous oral storytelling and theatre.

The intention of the conversation starter questions below is not to talk about what the poet intended in the poem but to use it as a jumping off point for looking at how gesture, tone, pace, body language, and volume can be used as performance tools.

For each video there is also a writing prompt to turn students back to their own writing process. This could instead be used as a strategy to consolidate the students' learning and wrap up the lesson (i.e. at the end, select from the 5 prompts and write your own poem). The goal of this lesson is for students to become interested in poetry as a tool to tell their own stories.

Hook

Invite students to write for three minutes about anything they want. Each learner will need a pen, paper, and/or accessible writing device.

Content

The artists featured here were a part of the 2012 Toronto Poetry Slam team. The recordings are from more recent dates with the exception of the group piece at the end of this list.

Have your students watch each video, in small groups or as a class, and talk about what they saw. The guiding questions following the links may help start a reflective conversation.

Britta Badour, *Dear Young Woman*, 2019, 2:53 mins

<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1453981764001>

Conversation prompts:

What do you like about this poem?

What words or phrases jumped out at you?

What facial expressions did Britta use?

Writing prompt: What are your hopes?

David Delisca, *Five Foot Post (An Ode)*, 2020, 2:58 mins

<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1774551619538/>

Conversation prompts:

How does David use his voice to perform this poem?

How did the music make you feel?

What story is David telling us?

Writing prompt: Who are you missing or remembering today?

Charlie Petch, *Transilience*, 2018, 1:33 mins

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lomsO839dtw>

Conversation prompts:

What do you remember?

How was it to see the poem on screen while Charlie performed it?

What questions do you have about Charlie's poem?

Writing prompt: What does your inner kid dream of?

This poem was published by Brick Books in Charlie's 2021 book *Why I Was Late*

Tanya Neumeyer, *Tomboy*, 2017, 1:40 mins

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tHjqT1IWMEE>

Conversation prompts:

What stands out after hearing this poem?

What does the audience sound like?

What gestures did Tanya use?

Writing prompt: Describe a moment that changed you when you were a kid

Team Piece by Britta Badour, David Delisca, Charlie Petch, and Tanya Neumeyer

You Know What Pisses Me Off? 2012, 2:30 mins

<https://youtu.be/nxng6FFf3qQ?t=1500>

Conversation prompts:

What was it like to see 4 poets on stage together?

How did you feel when the poets yelled?

How did the poets coordinate their actions?

What do you think it's like to write a poem as a team?

Writing prompt: What pisses you off?

Special mention goes to the coach of this team, Alessandra Naccarato, who gave the team the prompt to write about what pisses you off.

Some conversation prompts after watching all the poems include: How do the poems speak to one another? What do these poets have in common? What have you learned about spoken word today?

Consolidation

Invite students to write about any of the writing prompts not used or about what poetry can do for 3 minutes to book end the lesson. As a possible extension activity, ask students to look on YouTube and bring a link to a poem they like to the class for discussion.

Thank you for sharing these poems in your classroom. Book a poet today! www.poets.ca/pits