Slam Poetry Assignment

Everyone in class will be writing, rehearsing, and performing their own slam poem at the end of this poetry unit. We have been watching a variety of slam poems to help give you ideas for shaping your own poem and your performance of that poem to bring it alive in the form of “Slam”!

General Guidelines:

- Pick a topic about which you feel strongly. It can be serious or funny, deep or heartwarming, but you should feel personally connected to the topic so that your delivery of it will be genuine.
- Your topic should not be something that will offend or hurt any particular person or a group of people.
- You should have a clear message about your topic (theme) that you wish to share with the audience.
- The slam poem should be memorized and run at least 2 minutes. (Full marks for complete memorization, if not memorized your performance should at least demonstrate that you have rehearsed and do not need to read word for word from your paper).
- Both the poem and the performance require considerable and deliberate planning on your end. When writing the poem, you will need to carefully choose words, rhymes, line breaks, and poetry/sound devices to enhance the oral nature of the poem. When planning the performance, you will need to plan for oral delivery (when to pause, when to speed up, when to raise your voice, when to whisper, etc.) as well as facial expressions, gestures, and overall body language.

Slam Poetry Prompts: (Suggestions Only)

- Write a poem to a body part, a piece of clothing, a random object.
- Write a poem from the point of view of an object.
- Write a poem from the perspective of your bully, bullies or your victim(s) about an incident that happened.
- Write a poem about someone you despise or view as a villain. What happens when you look at your enemy and search for his or her merits? Can you see the good in someone you see as bad?
- Write a poem about someone you admire. You don’t have to know or love someone to pay tribute to them. Write a poem honoring one of your heroes, someone who has, from a distance, made a difference in your life.
- Write a poem about something that happened to someone you know. Write about it as if it had happened to you.
- Write a poem about your shadow. (Some ideas for brainstorming: How does it change when you move? What does it look like in different kinds of light, in different situations? What would happen if you lost it? Does it have a secret life?)
- Write a poem based on your belief about life after death... or about what you WISH you believed.
- Write a poem in the form of a message or letter to your future self.
- Write a poem about something or someone you lost.
- Write a poem about your family heritage.
- A letter you would like to write or a conversation you would like to have with an important figure in our society (the President, a famous religious leader, a cultural icon, etc.)
- Your favorite piece of literature, favorite song, or favorite work of visual art, and why it speaks to you.
A rant about a political, social, educational, or ecological issue about which you’d like to speak your mind
-A person, pet, or object you have lost that was important to you, and the experience of losing him/her/it
-An especially good or bad day in your recent experience, and how you felt on that day
-Advice you received from a friend, parent, or teacher that seems especially good or especially bad (you can respond to the advice, or explain what happened when you followed/failed to follow it)
-A travel experience that challenged you or taught you something worthwhile
-Write a poem that includes allusion to other texts (hip hop lyrics, movie lines, slogans) to make a social commentary on some aspect of the media.
-Write a poem about the pressures, challenges, joys, and issues teenagers face every day.

Slam Poetry Planning

Complete the organizer below to help you plan for your slam poem. You will hand in all of your planning and writing process notes.

1. What is your topic?

2. What do you want your audience to know about your topic?

3. What emotions/feelings do you hope to bring out in your audience about your topic?

4. Why is this topic important for your audience?

5. If your audience does not listen to this poem, what will happen? (If your answer is “nothing,” then you need to think more about why your topic is important. Don’t waste the audience’s time with a message that doesn’t matter. Find something worth saying!)

6. What life experiences have you had with this topic? Why are you choosing it?

Your opening line must immediately throw your listeners into the poem. Examples:
“In case you hadn’t noticed, it has somehow become uncool to sound like you know what you’re talking about?” – Taylor Mali
“I have biracial hair.” – Zora Howard

7. How might you open your poem?

8. Once you have your topic and your message about the topic figured out, you will need to start planning the storyline (narrative) of the poem based on Slam-founder Marc Smith’s suggestions in his book Take the Mic.

Character – How will you let your audience know who you are, what you think, and what you feel?

Time and Place – Where and when is your story “set”?

Action – What parts of the poem will involve specific events and actions not just abstract ideas and concepts?

Obstacles and Conflict – What challenges will pop up? Are the conflicts internal or external?

Point of View – What is your take on the topic of your poem? How will you show your perspective?

Crisis – What’s the moment of tension leading up to your bull’s eye?
Bull’s Eye – How will you hit target and deliver your “punchline”?

*Write your first draft of the poem now. Don’t worry about it being perfect/performance ready. Just get your ideas on the page.

9. Now that you have your poem’s storyline planned and the first draft written, you are ready to start planning which specific words and poetry and sound devices you will use to enhance the oral nature of your poem.

**Poetry Devices**
- You must include repetition of one word, one phrase, or one sentence to share the key message of the poem.
- You must include at least two other poetry devices: metaphor, simile, imagery, symbol, personification, oxymoron, hyperbole, allusion, etc.

**Sound Devices**
- You must include some rhyme to make the oral nature of the poem really *pop*, but it doesn’t have to rhyme throughout the whole poem.
- You must include at least two other sound devices: alliteration, onomatopoeia, rhythm, euphony, cacophony, assonance, etc.
10. Now that you have planned out the poetry and sound devices, it is time to start editing and revising your draft poem to include all of the ideas you have brainstormed. The writing process is not a simple or quick one. Plan to read and re-read your poem several times, making small “tweaks” and edits each time until you have the poem looking and sounding just “right”. Please hand in multiple drafts of the poem to show your meticulous editing and revision work.

11. Choose your words: Use a thesaurus to help you select just the right words for your poem. Rather than saying the rocking chair looked “sad”, perhaps “dejected” or “gloomy” might be more powerful. Identify the words in your poem that you are going to replace with better synonym here:
Slam Performance Planning

12. Once you have polished the poem, you are ready to begin planning your performance of it. Of course, once you start practicing the poem aloud, you may find that you still want to make some changes to the written poem, and please feel free to do so. Consider how you will perform your poem...

What lines will you emphasize through your voice? How will you do that?

How will you vary the speed and rhythm of the poem? What will you speed up? What will you slow down?

Will you use pause to create tension in the audience or emphasize a particular word or phrase?

Which words will you pay particular attention to articulating strongly?

How will you portray the message of the poem through your mood, facial expressions and body language?
# Slam Poetry Evaluation

**PERFORMANCE** /30

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**POEM** /30

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**COMMENTS**