



STUDY GUIDE

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THE POETRY LOUNGE 3: The Power of Performance

Spoken Word poetry is a contemporary form of performance that has revitalized young people's appreciation of the poetic form. Spoken Word can be distinguished from more traditional poetry the way a play can be distinguished from a novel, in that it is written specifically to be performed. Where a traditional poem is often purposefully obscure and is intended for multiple rereadings, spoken word poets have only one chance to communicate their meanings to the audience. Like plays, spoken word poetry is designed to elicit an immediate and visceral audience reaction. Because of this a lot of power must be packed into the poem.

The following guide is designed to be used interactively with the Poetry Lounge DVDs. For each poet, we have included material that can help you point out salient features of the poet's craft to student along with teaching ideas that can be used as prompts to help students in their writing and performance of spoken word poetry.

In some cases the power of the poetry comes from the artist's performance. Just like the skill of an actor can make a play powerful, how the poet performs his/her poetry often has a great deal of impact on how the audience responds. "The Poetry Lounge 3: The Power of Performance" is designed to help students explore how they can use aspects of performance to enhance their poetry.

Performance is a unique feature of spoken word poetry. Although some aspects of performance need to be introduced to students with ongoing exercises (such as eye contact, voice projection, and movement) some can be taught through using experienced poets as models.

There are particular features of language and action that cause the audience to respond to your poetry performance. Here are some suggestions from the Poetry Lounge:

1. **Deferred Race – Brutha Gimel**

- a. **Speed and Timber:** This poem indicates the power of performance in spoken word poetry. If we were to simply read this poem it is unlikely that it would have the same impact. By acting out his running of the race he is actually illustrating the extended metaphor that frames his poem. The metaphor is communicated through the poet's actions and through his use of fast and slow and loud and soft voice dynamics.
- b. **Teaching Idea:** Have students pair up and take turns delivering a line to each other. The line should be something like "Hey, look at that baby." Have the students say the line with a different gesture (as if saving a baby, or watching a superhero baby fly, or as if the baby is an attractive grown-up). Have some volunteers act out their lines and talk about how gestures can change the meaning of a line. Discuss how the gestures not only give the audience a better

understanding of the author's meaning but how gestures can all writers to choose words more effectively.

2. Courage – Crystal Irby

- a. Repetition: This poet can be used to teach the power of repetition. By starting several lines of her poem with “and I finally got the courage to...” the audience gets the feeling of being pushed forward. This gets the audience emotionally involved with the poetry.
- b. Speed: This poet also uses stops in the middle of line breaks. This makes the audience anticipate what is coming. You can see that she also speeds up and delivers several lines at a faster pace. Again, this gives the audience the feeling of movement in the poem.
- c. Teaching Idea: Have the students' write a 2x4 comic (two panels across four down) based on the “I Used to Believe...But Now I Know...” pattern. In each column students start the caption with the words, “I used to believe” and start the second panel with the words “but now I know.” They will use this construction four times (in the four rows down) and will illustrate each panel with a graphic. This lets students see the power of repetition in that each column, even though it starts with the same words, tells us something different about the author. Students can then use a repeated phrase as the basis for a poem (offer several repeated phrases). There are other types of poems that use repeated phrases including Irish Curse poems (I curse you with...), I Am From Poems, and many others.

3. Mumm-Ra vs Panthro – Paul Mabon

- a. Intertextuality and Imagery: This poet uses another text (the cartoon Thunder Cats) to frame his poem. By referencing another text that the audience is familiar with, the poet gives a sense of his point of view (he is narrating the poem as if he is a child). This intertextuality also allows the audience to form particular pictures in their minds (of the Thunder Cats characters). This powerful use of imagery immediately makes the poem have a greater impact.
- b. Teaching Idea: This poet uses a persona – a character who performs (a small child). One way to have students develop a persona is to place several pairs of shoes in the front of the room and ask students to describe what the person who owns the shoes might be like. Using their information create character studies on the board. Then have several perform a line from a poem (any poem, it doesn't matter) as the character who owns the shoes. Have students create a list poem (like I Am From) for one of the characters who owns the shoes.

4. MONSTERS – Poetri

- a. Point of view: The power of this performance comes partially from the fact that the poet uses implied conversational partners. He acts like he is speaking directly to the men who work out and to the monsters. This poet also asks direct questions of the audience. This forces listeners to take an active role while listening to the poem.

- b. Exaggerated movements: This poet uses exaggerated movements to emphasize particular parts of his poetry. These movements tell the audience when he is finishing part of his story or joke.
- c. Teaching Idea: Write a short poem on the board (five to six lines). Have the students read the poem aloud in unison. Ask students to suggest a movement that corresponds with each line in the poem and narrow it down until each line of the poem has a corresponding piece of choreography. Reread the poem a couple of times with the students incorporating the choreography. You can then change the choreography and see how the change in movements affects the meaning of the poem.

5. VERBALLY DISTURBED – Sekou tha Misfit

- a. Rhythm: This poem is a collection of the poet’s musings about his own writing. Like the poem “God Doesn’t Make Mistakes” this poem is not a narrative. What makes this poem so powerful is the poet’s use of “hip-hop” rhythm. Most hip hop songs are written in a 4/4 rhythm and this poet uses that familiar beat to give structure to his poem. This is particularly powerful because the topic of his poem is about writing “rhymes” a colloquialism for hip hop lyrics. So, the rhythm of the poem supports the topic of the poem.
- b. Stanza length: Another important feature of this poem is that the poet performs long stanzas without stopping to take a breath. It is easy to see the audience’s appreciative reaction to this poet’s skill in vocal performance.
- c. Teaching Idea: Have students listen to hip hop songs and clap their hands with the beat. Then take a line from a traditional poem and change it so that it has the same beat as a hip hop song. Next, try to change a hip hop lyric to a different beat (like iambic pentameter). Discuss how the beat influences word and line length choice.

DEFERRED RACE

By Brutha Gimel

So I'm hanging on the block with my crew, right?
And Uncle Sam approaches in the form of Popo.
My boys disperse, straight get ghost.
But since I decide to stay, Jake.
I mean, Uncle Sam told me had this task you wanna throw my way
as his partner's beginning to pat me down
he's like, don't bother turning around
the challenge is this
if you can run 100 + 1 yards non stop on
a straight away beaten path
you'll be granted total and complete liberation.
In other words, we'll stop sweatin' you
Can you do it, boy?
Aren't you gonna clock or me or nothin'?
Shooff. I take off with all the intensity and vigor my little body can Muster.
I'm gonna win. With my eyes on the prize of my imagination's favorite muse.
Freedom.
Conquering my life's insecurities and inhibitions
while increasing intuition
one yard at a time.
Diminish your self hate with a high stepped sense of pride
and astride of [sovereign awareness]
That's my encouragement.
Capable of making calculated[snap decisions]like putting them
up and putting them down in a flash.
This is the dash of a lifetime.
A generation. A a race. Run!
60 yards in I begin to contemplate the responsibilities
of my future emancipation as possible.
Run! For all the black activists, artists, dreamers and freedom fighters
who have never left for the promised land.
Run! I own up to your ideals,
each one,
teach one,
leading by example and not letting you down.
The weight on my shoulder I don't mind if it's how I'll be defined.
By the 90 yard line
I'm starting to feel like the weight is over.
Nothing can stop me now, social progress is mine.

I attack 95 with tears in my eyes and a feeling I've never
been deprived [by the eyes in the glasses at my 9 to 5]
Fatigued and winded I oppose 96
willing to commit to a strategy to rehabilitate convicts
Defy gravity 'cause it is not a coincidence that I'm saying goodbye half hazardly as 97th
and 98th yards are overcast by ambition and fate.
I grind out 99
with upraised spine
and my chin just got no more obstacles to now bump my chest than glory, bam!
I'm stopped in my tracks, unable to make the final yard mark.
I'm reaching for the door to freedom but I
can't quite reach the knob, there's something
stopping me, and it's--
There's an anklet.
It's nice, it's like platinum and gold and with some diamonds on it.
Oh, and the diamonds--
Look at that chain!
Oh, that's a really nice chain, man. That chain's long enough it's like four, five
hundred years long
I can put some joints around my wrist
I can trade it in and put some joints around my neck and have a whole
matching set on me to flash on the block.
I could take the rest of it and trade it in for a new whip.
Brand new mansion. I'll be the flyest dude on this block!
In my new 500 Benz.
Thinking of the Benz.
I was going somewhere.
I was gonna get--
But before that I had to--
We were gonna--
It was--
Damn. Guess my
race got deferred.

COURAGE

By Crystal Irby

I've been in the valley
Wishing I was on the mountain top
I've been on the sand
Wishing I was in the ocean
I've been in the darkness
Praying for the light
I've been in the morning
Praying the night
So I could cry
Just a little bit longer for you
And I've been on earth
Praying for heaven
I've been where broken hearts go
And I don't wanna see the end of the world anymore

So I finally got the courage
To swallow my cries
And I finally got the courage
To stop believin' your lies
And I finally got the courage
To stop waiting on your phone call
And I finally got the courage
To take those dead roses off the wall
And I finally got the courage
To say no
And the world didn't end
Like I thought it would
And I finally got the courage
To let you go
And I kept on breathin'
Like I...Like I never thought I could

So I finally got the courage
To pray to God to get over you
I mean to really get over you
And I finally got the courage
To take your photographs outta plain view
And I finally got the courage
To wash your T-shirts
So they don't feel like you

And I finally got the courage
To delete your numbers
From my phone
So I won't call
And I finally got the courage to realize
You don't miss me at all
When I check my messages
And I don't hear your voice
When I check my caller ID
And I don't see your name
On my birthday...the holiday...or just Wednesday

So I finally got the courage
To stop thinkin' I was born into this world just to love you
And I finally got the courage
To stop thinkin' being by your side is all I could ever do
And I finally got the courage
To stop fantasizing and rehearsing our reunion
Because I finally got the courage
To realize our time had reached its conclusion
So I finally got the courage
To be mad at you for leavin' me
And I finally got the courage
To stop going to the places I knew you'd be
Dressed in my best outfit
For you to see
To make you realize
Just how much you really/really missed me

So I finally got the courage to realize
Maybe you and I weren't written in the stars
And I finally got the courage
To put peroxide on all my scars
To cleanse my wounds
So my heart would have no bars
And I finally got the courage
To stop missing the smell of you on my pillow
And I finally got the courage
Too stop missing you lying beside me
And I finally got the courage
To stop missing you looking into my eyes
To stop missing you touching me
Stop missing you holding me
Stop missing you kissing me

Stop...missing...you

So give me the gold medal
And the heavy weight belt
I ran the longest distance
And I took the hardest blow
Give me the trophy and the crown
That reads
Broken heart healed/Lost self found
Engrave my name on a plaque
Write the date in the history books
Today I did the hardest thing I ever had to do
Today I woke up and realized
I finally got the courage
To get over you

MUMM-RA VS PANTHRO

By Paul Mabon

Thunder! Thunder!!! Thunder!!!!!! Thundercats Hoooooooooooo!!!!!!!
5th grade I was Panthro! Hands go Wappa! Wappa! Wappa!
with my nun chucks to much for any domestic abusing foe!
Shoulder straps! Spiked tips! Muscles ripped! The Coolest Thundercat!
And even though he was blue, you knew he was black!
Back when Mom's only son wasn't afraid to act when
we were on our own then
He came home
"Wonder if he gonna live with us?"
Didn't trust him, like most boys do grown men moving in
"He spending the night again?
How come he got three pieces of fish?
I did clean up! He used that dish! Wish he just gone somewhere!
That's not fair! He cain't tell me what to do, he ain't my Daddy!
I ain't even do nothing! Why you mad at me?"
Because she loved him. She was happy.
Next few years instincts wouldn't let it go, let it flow
"Paul, Charles said you wanna go fishin?" No!
"I'm watchin Thundercats, all-day-long!
Playing with action figures singin that song
Dun Da Dun da Dun Da Da, Thundercats are loose!"
In Today's Episode
The evil Mumm-Ra The Ever-Living aka Charles,
is living with Panthro's mom
But Panthro uses his nun-chuks to beat up Mumm-Ra till he's gone!
Oh no! Panthro! We're under attack! Calm down! What's wrong WilyKat?
I was cruising in the Thundertank when Jacklman jacked me,
for The Eye of Thundera! And then he went and slapped me! Thhhh! AHHHH!
Mumm-Ra's using the The Eye to hypnotize your mom!
Lion-O gave me the Sword of Omens, should we tell him what's wrong?
Lion-O's a punk! I should have been the leader!
Then I could date Cheetara and have some baby pather-cheetas!
Alright Mumm-Ra I'm bringing out my nun-chucks! Wappa! It's time to die!
Stop hypnotizing my mom! Wappa! And give back the Thundera's eye!
Wake up Mom! Mumm-Ra's evil! Remember when it was just us?
"Panthro! Watch out Mumm-Ra's power is about to bust!" Boom!
Quick! Everybody run to your room! Cover your ears. Get under the cover!
Get under the cover! Boom!
Get under the cover!
Get under the cover!

Get under the cover!
Stop hittin my Mother!
Stop hittin my Mother!
Stop hittin my Mother!
stop hittin my mother

MONSTERS

By Poetri

I have demons. They lie and wait for the perfect time
when I'm feeling weak and vulnerable
When I don't have my guard up
when I'm thinking hard about something, they make me eat
when I don't wanna eat.
I have something worse than demons.
I have monsters, in my stomach.
Oh, you don't believe me?
You think I'm fat 'cause I wanna be fat?
You don't think I wanna have a six pack?
Take off my shirt at any given time?
Like all those pretty working out types brothers do for no reason at all?
Why is your shirt off, man?
It's zero degrees outside. Why is your shirt off?
I remember when the monsters were just babies.
They were trying to make me eat something and I would just laugh.
Oh, be quiet little monster. We just ate.
Then I would run outside and go play basketball
and work out all the calories I ate that day.
Man those were the good old days. But now, my
monsters are full grown adults
conniving my taste buds like humans manipulate other humans
and it just don't seem right when I go dragging to go get 99
cent chicken nuggets on Tuesday when I already had El Pollo Loco talking about I can't
pass up this deal.
Come on, monsters!
We just ate!
They keep me from the gym.
You don't believe me. You think I wanna wear a size 4X
'cause all the kids do. Well, this may be a
shocker to you, but I'm not skinny and I'm not that hip.
I wear a size 4X because that's the only size that fits me and my monsters and how mad
do I get when I go to the store trying
to find the biggest size only to find that the biggest sizes
are all sold out.
Some skinny cool kid bought them all.
Get your own size!
Every time, every time I even think about going to work out
the monsters devise a plan to thwart my mission and I end up working
out a way to get to KFC.

Hey, you should see me when I eat. How many people sweat when they eat?
Just me?
It's because the monsters are hard at work devouring all the food that they force me to
put on my plate.
I hate the false feeling of getting a work out while I'm eating.
But if you ever catch me after grubbin on a hot plate at aunt Mae's house you might
think that I just ran a marathon,
sweating like an athlete fat as a couch potato, these monsters
got jokes man, man.
You don't believe me.
You don't believe in monsters.
That's how they get you.
I used to be that way, too.
Monsters can find a home anywhere in your body.
They may not be in your stomach, but you
checked your heart lately?
Monsters lurk like babies just waiting to get adult, and if you don't watch it, they grow
up fast,
helping you hate everyone who tries to help you
you didn't get a reputation for being cold hearted but I know that truth.
You just got monsters in your heart.
I can't tell you how to get help because they're not my own monsters.
Your best bet is to pray. The sooner we realize there are monsters inside of all of us The
better this world will be.
I have monsters in my stomach.
Where are yours?

VERBALLY DISTURBED

By Sekou tha Misfit

When I write a rhyme,
it's like I lose all sense of time
Space becomes irrelevant, there's only state of mind
So I climb and elevate, create and celebrate
"Poetical" entrees that make you salivate
Till your palate aches and craves to taste the rave
I bake soufflés of words my medulla marinades
Then I serenade cerebellums leaving hypothalamuses busted
Numbing motor skills, cause I flow to thrill
Ill be the rhythms of the night so I'm giving up delight
And insight that puts me in flight
Then write ten hype lines that bend light
And send fright to foes, and send might to those
Who relate to this altered state lyrics cultivate
Can't concentrate when I wants to make rhymes
And even if I never get a monetary payoff
My poetry brings order to my chaos--
...it's hard to explain.

When I write a rhyme,
I make the most incomprehensibly understandable
Contradictory lyrics of the time
Spherically designed for a continuum of lines
I'm gon' send you one of mine, and watch it bend you by the spine
I'm inclined to spend my time caught up in a beat
Forget to shave, to eat, forget to bathe, to sleep
I'm a slave of freaked verses that disperse with my ills
Leaving my hunger fulfilled by the thrill of the words that spill
From the larynx when I share a mix, but beware of tricks
That bleed from the sleeves of diseased emcees
Who please the masses, but fail hip-hop classes
Cause they see the world through commercial glasses
So he passes the mic back to the real
I blast with a hype track, and I kill the pain
When I feel the rain of verbal precipitation on my brain
You know I find this all
rather difficult to explain.

When I write a rhyme
It's like I enter a world of words

Adjectives and adverbs surge in my nerves
Until herds of absurd concepts emerge
Leaving me on the verge of being Verbally Disturbed
So I splurge on a record, which provokes the track
Which provokes the rap, which provokes the stacks
But even with no contract it hurts not to disperse a verse
It's kind of like a blessing and a curse

When I write a rhyme, the whole world is mine
Ain't no space and time, only state of mind
When I write a rhyme, everything is fine
Ain't no ghetto crimes, ain't no chalk lines
When I write a rhyme, the whole world is mine
Ain't no space and time, only state of mind
When I write a rhyme, everything is fine
Nobody's totin' nines, nobody's doing lines. . . .
When I write a rhyme.

And I could write rhymes till I'm weak and I ache in my bones
And still write till I get carpal tunnel syndrome
And keep writing till my record contract is blown
And still write till my home gets foreclosed on
And write rhymes till I'm broke, car repossessed
And still write till my wife took the kids and left
And keep writing till I see the first signs of death
And take it all with no stress, cause I'm so dang fresh

AND ONE DAY! I'm gonna be up in the game
AND ONE DAY! Everyone will know my name
AND ONE DAY! I'm gonna have the cash and fame
And maybe then it won't be so hard to explain
AND ONE DAY! I'm gonna be up in the game
AND ONE DAY! Everyone will know my name
AND ONE DAY! I'm gonna have the cash and fame
And maybe then I can explain how it is

When I write a rhyme.

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