

# Study Guide For Teachers

## Poetry Meets Percussion In *Beats, Rhymes and Life*

Presented by  
Young Audiences  
(866) 500-9265  
[www.yanj.org](http://www.yanj.org)  
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### ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Prepare to be dazzled by spoken word poet Jacob Winterstein as he performs amazing spoken word poetry to the accompaniment of gifted percussionist, Josh Robinson. This rhythmic duo will demonstrate how beat, meter, rhyme and verbal dexterity are not only the concerns of the poets that children study in school, but also of contemporary slam performers.

This program combines the verbal mastery of a spoken word poet with the rhythms of percussion to show children that the language of poetry and music are inextricably linked by their use of beats and rhythms.

### LEARNING GOALS

Students will:

- Have an aesthetic experience of poetry and music through a performance.
- Understand that performance poetry is a dynamic and engaging way to express oneself.
- Understand the similarities between music and poetry, such as rhythm, repetition and tempo.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

**Spoken-word poetry** has been around for literally hundreds of years. Many of the poems that children still study in books began as performance pieces. William Shakespeare is probably the best known performance poet, because all of his plays were written in verse and were meant to be performed. In fact, it was Shakespeare's actors who finally wrote his plays down so that we can study them today. Without this effort, all of his great plays would have died on the stage, soon after they were performed.

Spoken-word also has strong roots in the West African griot tradition. The griot was a storyteller and historian who spoke or sung the history of his people, and was the basis of an oral tradition that is still alive today among Africans in their homeland, and in the African diaspora.

A **percussion instrument** is any object which produces a sound by being hit with an implement, shaken, rubbed, scraped, or by any other action which sets the object into vibration. The term usually applies to an object used in a rhythmic context or with musical intent.

Anthropologists and historians often speculate that percussion instruments were the first musical devices ever created. The human voice was probably the first musical instrument, but percussion instruments such as hands and feet, then sticks, rocks, and logs were almost certainly the next steps in the evolution of music. The earliest percussion instruments were our hands and feet, then "found" objects such as sticks, logs, and hips. Percussion instruments of today include drums, xylophones, cymbals, the triangle and bells.

## BEFORE THE PROGRAM

Please discuss the following topics:

- ◆ Theater etiquette
  - ◆ Participation etiquette
1. Explain the various styles of poetry, i.e. haiku, free verse, sonnet, limerick, rap.
  2. Expose student to poetry in book, CD & DVD format.
  3. Read a poem to students on a regular basis. Have poetry readings in the library/auditorium in addition to classroom readings. Select a student to recite a short poem during morning announcements.
  4. Prominently display books on poetry throughout your classroom.
  5. Explain what a percussion instrument is, and give examples of various instruments such as drums, triangles, bells and xylophone.

## AFTER THE PROGRAM

1. Create a poetry anthology that could be accompanied with drawings. Each student should receive a copy as well as the librarian.
2. Ask the students to transform the songs that they enjoy into a poem or free verse.
3. Establish a "poetry bulletin" to display student's work. Begin a "poetry day" whereby poetry is celebrated weekly.
4. Ask students to create teams of two to compose original poetry. One student will perform the poetry while the other accompanies the poetry with the rhythm of a percussion instrument using a found object or actual instrument.

## RESOURCES

### **Books**

*Poetry for Young People Series.* Sterling Publishing  
*Hip Hop Speaks to Children.* Sourcebooks Jabberwocky. 2008.  
*Hip Hop Poetry and the Classics* by Alan Lawrence Sitomer. Milk Mug. 2004  
*Poetry Speaks to Children.* Edited by Elise Paschen and Dominique Raccah. Sourcebooks MediaFusion. 2005.

### Websites

[www.poetryoutloud.org](http://www.poetryoutloud.org)

## VOCABULARY WORDS

**beat-** a rhythmical sound or movement; a single element of measured time in a musical piece or poem.

**meter-** the pattern of beats that combines to form musical rhythm.

**cadence** – the way in which poetry flows according to a rhythm.

**tempo-** the speed or pace of a musical composition.  
free verse- verse without fixed metrical patterns; usually having unrhymed lines of varying length.

**slam poetry-** is a postmodern form of performance poetry that occurs within a competitive poetry event called a "slam" at which poets perform their own poems.

## ARTIST INFORMATION

**Josh Robinson** was born in the musical community of Woodstock NY, Josh Robinson began playing percussion at an early age on pots and pans. He performed with Sankofa, an African drum and dance ensemble in New York for five years. He has studied at AMLA (Asociacion de Musicos Latinoamericanos) in Philadelphia, and recently went to Cuba and Brazil for studies in drum, dance and musicology. He has performed with the Magee Rehabilitation Theatre Group, a group dedicated to acting and improvisation for people with disabilities. He performs regularly in nightclubs with "SOUL SAMBA." He is also a member of a percussion ensemble that performs music from Cuba and Brazil. He has been performing with his wife Giovana for many senior citizen centers, assisted/independent living facilities, using music as a tool for entertainment, group activities, and participation.

**Jacob Winterstein's** poetic journey started when he was a high school student. He was an activist who spoke about improving Philadelphia's schools at rallies, city council hearings and school board meetings. He was also peer educator known for using humor to share information about living healthy lives with his peers. He also liked free styling (improvisational rap) with his friends. At Temple University, Jacob studied poetry as performance under the tutelage of Dr. Kimmika Williams-Witherspoon. Dr. Williams-Witherspoon helped him fuse his political beliefs, humor, observations, love of rhyme and attention seeking skills into performance poetry. Jacob has been writing, performing and teaching poetry for nine years. He has represented Philadelphia at the National Poetry Slam and the Individual World Poetry slam. He has performed and taught in Europe, Africa and across the U.S. in community centers, schools, prisons, universities and after school programs.