

Study Guide for Teachers

Poetry Meets Percussion *Beats, Rhymes, and Life*

presented by
Young Audiences New Jersey & Eastern PA
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ABOUT THE PROGRAM

This rhythmic duo demonstrates 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 energetic and engaging exploration of percussion and poetry introduces students to how rhythms and spoken word can awaken their inner artists. Through poetry and percussive sound, students are awakened to both verbal and non-verbal ways to express themselves while learning to develop their own unique voices—one word, one beat at a time.

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 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, 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 is a storyteller and historian who speaks or sings the history of their people, and was the basis of an oral tradition that is still alive today among Africans, both in their homeland and in the African diaspora.

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

The human voice was probably the first musical instrument, but anthropologists and historians often speculate that percussion instruments—hands and feet, then sticks, rocks, and logs—were the first musical devices ever created. Percussion instruments of today include drums, xylophones, cymbals, the triangle, and bells.

BEFORE THE PROGRAM

1. Explain some of the various styles of poetry (i.e., haiku, free verse, sonnet, limerick, rap).
2. Expose student to poetry in book, CD, and DVD format.
3. Read poems 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 students to transform songs that they enjoy into poems 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 performs the poetry while the other accompanies the poetry with the rhythm of a percussion instrument using a found object or actual instrument.

RESOURCES

Books

Alan Lawrence Sitomer, *Hip Hop Poetry and the Classics*.

Elise Paschen and Dominique Raccah, eds., *Poetry Speaks to Children*.

Nikki Giovanni, ed., *Hip Hop Speaks to Children*.

Sterling Publishing, *Poetry for Young People*.

Websites

www.poetryoutloud.org

ARTIST INFORMATION

Josh Robinson was born in the musical community of Woodstock, NY, and 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 has travelled 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 also performs with his wife Giovana for many senior citizen centers and 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, as an activist who spoke about improving Philadelphia's schools at rallies, city council hearings, and school board meetings. He was also a peer educator known for using humor to share information about living healthy lives with his peers, and enjoyed freestyling (improvisational rap) with his friends. At Temple University, Jacob studied poetry as performance under the tutelage of Dr. Kimmika Williams-Witherspoon, who 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, in Africa, and across the U.S. in community centers, schools, prisons, universities, and after-school programs.

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 has unrhymed lines of varying length.

Slam poetry: A postmodern form of performance poetry that occurs within a competitive poetry event called a "slam" at which poets perform their own