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Spoken poetry has power for the language arts classroom. Besides meeting standards such as theme, figurative language, word choice, and speaking and listening skills, the spoken word poem creates community in the classroom and gives students a voice. Students are able to share powerful thoughts through this medium. The spoken poem can also be used to take on a character from a novel or play or tell someone else’s story that needs telling. In this session, you will view and analyze spoken word poems, brainstorm and rough draft your own poem, and get a quick chance to revise. Then, if you wish, you can choose to perform your poem for the group.
Background
I wanted to create community, allow students to be creative, and start off with an assignment that all students could connect to and write. I had never watched or written spoken poetry before but knew it was an idea I should consider to meet all these goals. It was my first official writing assignment for the class. It also scared me so I thought that was a good sign.

Our Process
Enjoy watching spoken word poems
We watched and analyzed spoken word poems on Button Poetry. Warning: many of these are not school appropriate for all ages. I have juniors and seniors and therefore, more freedom than with younger students.
Poems we watched:

“OCD” – Neil Hilborn https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnKZ4pdSU-s

“Time”- Kurt Schroder https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wppaW096amU
{This one showed that a spoken word could be thoughtful and philosophical instead of completely personal}.

“To This Day”- Shane Koyczan https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltun92DfnPY
{This one is illustrated by different artists. So beautiful.}

Classroom Friendly There’s a whole section on Button Poetry on You-tube that has “classroom friendly” poems.

“Explaining my depression to my mother” – Sabrina Benaim-https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqu4ezLQEUA&index=4&list=PLC5PJtWBigV2f4TM4Gx7lPe1ummgg5jt

“Instructions for a bad day”- Shane Koyczan https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ss04h7Gr3Pc

“Repetition”- Phil Kaye https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6KI6c_IdvHg
“Pass On” - Michael Lee https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0JAq6VpmgBo&index=3&list=PLC5PJtWBigV2f4TM4Gx7lPe1ummgg5jt

“It Was the Winter” Hieu Nguyen - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_k9rL0R3R1k

Social Commentary
Troll- Shane Koyczan https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=670if6Et0oo
Analyze
We analyzed the poems by taking them apart when they were finished. The question I asked was, “What did the poet do to make the poem powerful?” We talked about metaphor, repetition, imagery, personification, tone of voice, and other poetic devices. We talked about how the poet must use these or it wasn’t poetry. We talked about how they would need to use these in their revisions. In the appendix is a list of poetic devices for students to consider using. It MUST work with the whole concept and idea of their poem; otherwise it detracts from the whole meaning obviously. The bottom line is the meaning.

Brainstorm
We brainstormed issues we cared about, things we hated about world, things we loved, the burning why questions that got to us, things that made them mad, family, friends, school, etc. I showed them my list of 20 ideas. Then we sifted the lists. What do you want to write? Mark out the ones you don’t feel like doing or don’t fit this genre. I ended up with three after sifting and chose one to write.

Rough draft
After choosing an idea, we jotted down a list of what we wanted to include in the poem. We wrote our poems. Students decided on their own on style and tone {sad, funny, angry, sarcasm, it just needs to fit them personally}. I had students break the lines and take out unnecessary words.

Revision
I challenged students to add poetic devices that would worked for their pieces. Some were better at this than others. We had time to revise together and give each other feedback and ideas on how to do this. Read the poem five times and walk away from it for a break. Come back and look at it with fresh eyes to see where it can be more powerful.
Poetic Devices for Spoken Word Poems
alliteration, assonance, imagery, metaphor, meter, onomatopoeia, personification, point-of-view, rhyme, rhyme scheme, simile, stanza, repetition, hyperbole

Performance
I did not make students memorize it. We used our papers which does hurt the performance but helps those of us who are scared to death. Instead of having the performances in one day, we spread it out over two weeks. The good part of this was that students had time to watch others and get courage. However, there was a diminishing return on this as after two weeks it had run its course and the few left didn’t want to go sometimes. They did because I cajoled but it had lost its magic a little. I would suggest a three-day time period depending on class size with a “sponge” assignment you can work it to soak up time if people are absent, etc. Also, three days doesn’t leave someone in the awkward position of being the only one presenting that day if they were absent.
Students could also create a video if they wished to get an A and not present in front of the class. Not a one did.

**Grading**
The way I encouraged students to get up and read their poems was that if they did so, it was an automatic A as long as it was a real effort {not 5 lines long or a joke}. The poem had to be something important to them and fairly lengthy. If they still didn’t think they could do it they could turn it in digitally but started at an 80% for an excellent. This encouraged many of them then others were encouraged when their classmates went or others read their poem and told them they should read it. It didn’t create immediate community as we are humans and you can’t just “add spoken word” and kazaam community. It did however start things off the way I wanted and it did give some students a voice who don’t normally share. It also allowed students to be very personal if they wished.

**Other ideas for using spoken word poems**

**Spoken Word poem “book report”** – Student chooses a character from their book, writes and performs or creates a video of a spoken word poem from their point of view

**History**- Student chooses a person in history to write a spoken word from their pov and time period with authenticity and accuracy from their research.
   Example: Holocaust “In the Belly of the Beast” Lexie Eski
   [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WARK962bbOI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WARK962bbOI)

   Slavery – “Taken” Shakeel Romero
   [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=snW2B1Y16w4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=snW2B1Y16w4)

**Social issues**- Student researches a social issue and uses the spoken word poem/video to show their audience why it’s important, what they should do.

   Feminism- “Like a Woman” – Annabelle Fern
   [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yz4shNTcltg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yz4shNTcltg)

**Appendix**

**Resources from Digital Poet**-
*Warning: he uses the f-bomb so you want to take what you want off the site and make your own resource.*
Ideas for Topics- http://www.digitalpoet.net/9-slam-poetry-topics--ideas
9 Topics & Ideas for Your Next Slam Poem

1. **Write a letter.** Try writing a letter to someone who has either passed or is no longer in your life.

2. **I'm sorry.** Think about words and sentiments that are tough for you to say. For me its things like "I'm sorry" and "I love you".

3. **Religion.** This is a difficult one - approach with caution. But don't worry about who you might offend, the piece is yours and no one can tell you how you should feel.

4. **Social Issues.** This topic can cover a wide range of sub-topics such as racism, hunger, economy, government, abortion, homosexuality, addiction, birth control/abortion, euthanasia, suicide, poverty. Here's a piece of advice - try to avoid blanket statements with no personal experience or factual backing. Broad statements like "our government is killing our youth" really don't mean anything.

5. **An incident that shaped you or changed you.** Were you ever bullied? Abused? Ever have a conversation where someone spoke just one line that impacted everything you've ever done since? Ever seen a movie that influenced and really impacted the way you live?

6. **Love.** The most utilized topic in the history of poetry, yet still to this day a love poem is an art that is marveled upon. What's great about love poems, when done correctly and in spoken word form, is they take the shape and persona of the artist.

7. **The Biography.** Pick a person that has been a part of your life. It can be someone as close as family, as distant as a sports superstar, or as instantaneous as a passing stranger. Use the person that's in your head right now. Start your poem with the reasons you thought of that person. I don't mean "I love my sister, she's not a mister, she's great, she's lovely and I hope she doesn't get caught in a twister". Be more abstract. Talk about the influence, talk about why it bubbles within you. Good opportunity to be a mature poet here!

8. **Frustration or Anger.** I know its just me, but these tend to be my favorites. It could be about sitting in traffic, losing an argument, not being able to prove your innocence, a divorce in the family, someone or something you loathe - the list can go on forever. Whatever you choose to vent on, be sure to hit the analogies and verbs hard in this one - oh, and alliteration goes a long way as well! You'll probably feel a lot better after you write this poem, and each time you perform it a relive the emotion will actually help make you a stronger person.

9. **The Story.** Pick an event in your life, and make it a dramatic one if possible. Ever commit a crime? Get in a fight? Witness a fight or crime? Almost die? Car crash? Keep on thinking and see what images come to mind - you can even make one up if it's a topic of interest. What usually happens in that case is your own truth gets tied into it.
A 9-Step Guide to Writing Slam Poetry

Advice from Digital Poet on Rhyming:

A. Rhyming deeper into your lines - try rhyming the last three, four - even five syllables or more. "Just 'cuz your attitude shattered chandeliers
Into blizzards of glass tears..."

B. Internal Rhyme - this is when you rhyme words within the same line. Here are a few examples:

"A smoke stack of throw backs who knows that...
"Can't combat the wombat, stick it to his mom that...
"...damaged love was a sandwich of...

C. The Outside-In Rhyme - an outside-in rhyme, which might or might not be a term that I coined myself, is when you rhyme the end of one line with the start of the next line. This adds flow to your piece, allowing one line to hop to the next more suave that osmosis. Outside-in rhymes make the next line sound more natural as well. Here's an example from my poem "Sick"

"...so sick of wandering deserts with a broken compass,
I've done this far too long..."

D. Compound Rhyme - compound rhymes are the rhyme scheme formed from two compound words where both words within the compound rhyme. An example would be "wildwood" and "childhood". Compound rhymes catch audience attention because they add flair to your lines. When implemented correctly, you'll definitely start sounding like a more advanced poet - "...a smokestack of throwbacks..." - but this one is a little tricky because smoke and throw are not exact rhymes. It’s sort of a compound-sonance rhyme (yea...made that up). See assonance below for more info!

E. Broken Rhyme Scheme - There is no set pattern for a broken rhyme scheme, but the object is to bring a verse together with 'slanted' rhymes, or rhymes that fall out of the expected rhythmic order. Here is an example from "I Am (a poem about life)"

I Am That Child Who Scares Parents
Sneaking Out The Back Door At 16, Careless,
3 AM,
Bottle Of Jack Daniels
Flying Off The Handles
Of Life
And Landing In Shambles...