2008-2009
HOT SEASON FOR
YOUNG PEOPLE PRESENTS

THE
MAYHEM
POETS
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Dear Teachers,

As the Mayhem Poets say, you are about to bring your students on a “verbal adventure,” where inventive writing, dynamic speaking, and true poetry are the thrill ride and the treasure hunt.

Slam Poetry/Performance Poetry/Spoken Word/Spoken Word Art are all names for an art form grounded in thousands of years of oral tradition, but with a contemporary style and energy for our new century.

Balancing entertainment and a sense of humor with a challenge to think and understand, the Mayhem Poets excite young people about the power of language to express their own personal voice.

TPAC Education

A note from our Sponsor - Regions Bank

For over 125 years Regions has been proud to be a part of the Middle Tennessee community, growing and thriving as our area has. From the opening of our doors on September 1, 1883, we are committed to this community and our customers.

One area that we are strongly committed to is the education of our students. We are proud to support TPAC’s Humanities Outreach in Tennessee Program. What an important sponsorship this is – reaching over 25,000 students and teachers – some students would never see a performing arts production without this program. Regions continues to reinforce its commitment to the communities it serves and in addition to supporting programs such as HOT, we have over 43 associates teaching financial literacy in our classrooms this year.

Thank you, teachers, for giving your students this wonderful opportunity. They will certainly enjoy the experience. You are creating memories of a lifetime, and Regions is proud to be able to help make this opportunity possible.

Jim Schmitz
Executive Vice President
Area Executive
Middle Tennessee Area
Kyle Sutton was born in Michigan and raised in Jersey, where he learned how to “lyrically split atoms” and “Kill-em with Concepts.” His smooth flowing, hard-hitting hip-hop style and dynamic theatrical presence have garnered him poetry slam victories across the nation, and brought him all the way to the Grand Slam finals at the legendary Nuyorican Poets Cafe’ in New York City. Kyle’s recent solo hip-hop project (under the pseudonym Skeptik) is currently being shopped to major as well as independent record labels, and includes songs featuring the likes of superstars KRS ONE and Busta Rhymes. With a B.A. in Spanish from Rutgers University, Kyle can communicate with a multitude of audiences and has led writing and performance workshops around the globe. He dedicates all of his artistic endeavors to the memory of his mother, Barbara Sutton.

Scott Tarazevits has a writing I-V attached to his psyche, thinks and drinks in rhyme and has been known to “clang.” His unique brand of humor mixed with an acerbic wit of Weird Al wordplay bring substantial reaction to any crowd. Scott co-wrote and performed in two acclaimed spoken word plays (Masque and New Street Poets), and was a 2005 Bowery Poetry Club Slam Finalist. As an actor, favorite roles have been Benedick in Much Ado About Nothing, Sir Toby in Twelfth Night, and Ira Stone in Laughter on the 23rd Floor. He holds a B.A. in both Journalism and Theater from Rutgers University, and has studied Acting, Movement, and Voice at Stella Adler, UCB and the Esper Studio.

Mason Granger originally from Willingboro, NJ, is a former co-host of Verbal Mayhem, the longest running open mic in New Jersey. His intelligent, yet accessible, style has been called “pure, unmitigated genius” by himself, “okay, I guess” by others. Always mindful to keep the fun in poetry, Mason seamlessly blends whimsy with social commentary to produce his own brand of pfouentry for all to enjoy.
Performance poetry is an accessible, appealing art form that can motivate students to foster an appreciation for both classic and contemporary poetic/theatrical expression.

Utilizing hip-hop rhythms and dynamic theatrical techniques, the Mayhem Poets have developed powerful performances and workshops to inspire people of all ages and backgrounds to craft and perform original poetry.

The Mayhem Poets have brought their experience to such notable venues as the Capitol Center for the Arts in Concord, New Hampshire, The Kilkenny Arts Festival in Kilkenny, Ireland, The New Victory Theater in Times Square New York and the Calgary International Children's Festival, as well as countless school districts, universities, detention centers, hospitals, poetry-slams and open mics.

Excerpt from the New York Times, November 2, 2007
MAYHEM POETS
By LAUREL GRAEBER

When Scott Raven Tarazevits ... proclaims from the stage of the New Victory Theater -- an enterprise devoted to family audiences -- how much he loves breasts and thighs, you may be tempted to cover the ears of the child sitting next to you. But it soon becomes clear that this isn't necessary. The juicy breasts and thighs Mr. Tarazevits is drooling over are the kind found at a barbecue, not a brothel. And before long his onstage compatriots, Kyle Sutton, above left, and Mason Granger, have leapt into the audience, busily flapping and clucking their accompaniment.

Mr. Tarazevits's ode to chicken is just one of the ways that he, Mr. Sutton and Mr. Granger, collectively known as Mayhem Poets, subvert expectations. Although their spoken-word performances derive from hip-hop, their material wouldn't make your grandmother blush, and there's nothing gangsta about their pose. (Their message is to write, not fight.) Having met several years ago as students at Rutgers University, the young men have said that their name is a play on the world-domination Mayhem Project mentioned in the film "Fight Club." But their only weapon is words, specifically the snappy, streetwise art known as slam poetry.
When did you fall in love with poetry?

Kyle: I fell in love with poetry in High School. I was an insecure, conflicted teen; prone to violence and failing in school. One of my teachers convinced me to sit down and write how I felt. He said I could say whatever I wanted, and he encouraged me to exaggerate. I put my pen to the paper and it seemed like it had a life of its own. Tears were streaming down my cheeks as I was expressing painful and powerful feelings that I’d kept locked inside me for years. From that point forward, lyrical expression became my therapy and led me on a path to college and a professional life as a poet.

Can you tell us some of your favorite poets?

Mason: Honestly, my favorite poet of all time is Dr. Seuss. As a child, my mom would read his books to me as bedtime stories, and I loved them purely from an imaginative angle- the wonderful “tiny-world-inside-of-our-world” concept in *Horton Hears A Who* or the absurdly odd weapon contraptions in *The Butter Battle Book* were things that made my 8 year old brain go wild. Now, looking back at these same books as an adult, I’m awestruck by Dr. Seuss’ ability to convey timelessly pertinent ideas in such a way that grasps both children and adults.

Do you have a particular way you write pieces, or is each creative process different?

Scott: Most of my (good) performance poems begin with a few random notes, some topical puns and alliterative phrases and eventually an outline for the poem which includes an overall concept and a possible ending. Often, it takes one word to inspire me and then everything related to that word; while on other occasions, it’s reflecting about a particular experience in my life. I prefer typing poems, but when I handwrite them, I always write the alphabet at the top of the paper cuz this helps me rhyme and practice what I like to call substitution. For instance, if I think of the phrase “The New York Knicks” seeing the alphabet allows me to easily mutate the phrase into The New York Kicks (a team of shoe salesman), the New York BICS (A team of writers) or the New York Licks (a team of ice cream-vendors possibly having a cook-off with the Los Angeles Bakers).

I do prefer writing in a busy room with multi-colored covered walls, ambient music playing in the background and lots of people, just as long as it’s no one I know to distract me from the task at hand.
Do you publish your work in written form?

Kyle: We are working on a series of books based on our poems; the first of which is entitled Food Fight. The premise is an epic battle between healthy and unhealthy foods. For more info go to www.animaghempoetry.com.

What to you, are the most significant differences between classical poetry and performance poetry? the most significant similarities?

Kyle: To me, the most significant differences are in the vernacular and the references/allusions. Reference-wise: technology, fashion, and values were very different in the classical era. As a result, the language used by Shakespeare, for example, took on a much different flavor. Modern day “classical” poetry tends to be very influenced by said flavor, which often times gives off a flowery and slightly more rigid air.

Contemporary performance poetry is a more loose form... It’s a mixture of old school and new school styles and references. Anything goes. It’s Mayhem.

Their similarities lie in the themes. Across the board popular themes are love, tragedy, comedy and struggle. Poetry in general is art. No matter what form it takes, art expresses the human soul.

What is it like working as a team? Do you like the group pieces or the solo pieces best?

Scott: It’s an absolute pleasure working on a team composed of not only co-workers, but friends. We do a good job of playing to each other’s strengths while on stage, always committed to making the show the funniest, most heartwarming and best it can be, each time out the gate. Sometimes it’s difficult (at least for me) to accept criticism or break from what I had initially intended to do, but it’s important to ultimately do what’s best for everyone and for the show as a whole, making sure to validate everyone’s opinions on a poem.

I actually prefer group pieces and being able to work off each other; it’s similar to a volleyball match. Sometimes a fellow poet will ‘set’ a joke for the other one to ‘spike’ home, while other times there’s a quick back and forth several times before one of us serves it back to the crowd. And still other times the poem bounces all over the place, and we’re lucky to even get it over the net. It’s this danger, this mystery of what the other person might throw at you, combined with whatever their energy level or mood might be for the day that can truly make group poems exciting. Of course, during solo-poems you are in control and can do as you please, but group poems not only allow for multiple perspectives on a single issue, but require a special timing and teamwork to execute properly.

What is it about rhyme and rhythm that make them such powerful modes of expression?

Mason: The fact of the matter is that we humans, like all things, are made of a collection of molecules and atoms, all vibrating with a certain rhythm. Thus, something that has rhythm, such as the cadence of a line with a well-constructed rhyme scheme, appeals to us on an innate level because it’s something that’s in us.....even more than that, it’s what we’re made of.
Contemporary performance poetry, also known as spoken word art, has evolved from a long history of oral tradition. Performance poetry began with the use of memorized poems, passed down from generation to generation in pre-literate societies, designed to maintain historical accounts and cultural traditions. This evolved most recently as American artists in the early 20th century began questioning standard, ‘academic’ literary forms and aesthetics. Performance poetry in America really took hold with the 1950’s, 60’s and 70’s Beat Poets\(^1\) and Black Arts Movement\(^2\). Today spoken word art is arguably one of the most widespread forms of popular poetic expression. The genre combines elements of music, theater, hip hop culture and literary poetry as its practitioners tackle a variety of social, historical, political and personal development issues. We gain a deeper understanding of the art form when we consider its predecessors and historical relationship to means distribution and audience reception.

Across human civilizations, poetry along with the spoken/performed word has been vital to communicating all aspects of the human condition. Wordsmiths have publicly expressed their thoughts and observations about love, hate, politics, family, neighbors, war, beauty and everything else concerning a people. West African *griots* (pronounced: gree-yohs), keepers of tribal history and tradition, would perform intricate poem-dance-songs for their own and neighboring tribes. These poetic expressions were passed down and memorized through an apprenticeship with a master performer/tribal historian. Dionysus, the ancient Greek god of fertility, is said to have delighted in dramatists Euripides and Sophocles as they competitively recited poems before large crowds. In fifteenth-century Japan, Samurai-turned-poet Basho wandered the countryside judging oratory haiku contests. Shakespeare, Homer, and Chaucer each crafted what critics now consider high literary works with the intention that they be recited aloud, not necessarily read on the page. Like today’s spoken word artists, these poets throughout history were concerned with accessibility and practical issues related to distribution.

The style of a poem has often been dictated by its intended audience and the way they will receive it. The movable type press was invented in the 1540s by Johannes Gutenberg. The machine provided a more efficient way to produce leaflets, newspapers and books. Before Gutenberg’s press, most duplicate copies of literature would have been either handwritten or block printed. Both were extremely labor intensive and impractical for mass distribution. Poets therefore crafted verse using highly memorable literary techniques such as vivid imagery, rhyme, rhythm, repetition, alliteration and meter. The poet or selected dramatists would ‘publish’ the piece through performance.

The oral performance of poetry continued to be the ideal method of distribution until the 1800s. Literacy rates were relatively low until the 1870s when the concept of free, public education began to take hold. Gutenberg’s printing process and the raw materials were also quite expensive. It was not until the early 19th century and the budding Industrial Revolution that printed materials became cost effective and accessible to the general public. Until that time (and arguably within standards of academia), literary poetry (page printed) was reserved for the elite, formally educated and wealthy. Some would argue that printed poetic texts were more complicated. A book in hand gave way for contemplation time that a performance did not. Page poetry could afford to be more nuanced. Literary poetry has been one of the classical arts associated with high level thinking and culture. As the printing and publishing industry developed, the performance of poems waned.

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1 Beat poetry represented a growing counterculture of writers who rejected mainstream American (social and literary) values. Their writing veered from literary norms and had a strong performative quality. Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs and Jack Kerouac are the most commonly known writers of this small, New York and San Francisco based group of white artists.

2 Black Arts Movement poets embraced writing and performing highly accessible, prophetic poems that would lead to black social, economic and cultural independence and activism.
A resurgence of performance poems accompanied the American Beat Poets and Black Arts Movement (BAM) of the 1950s-70s. These groups desired poetic gestures that were accessible and spoke to the current culture, energy and needs of a people. This contrasted with the more theory-based, academic aims of some modern writers and critics. BAM poets especially saw an opportunity to use poems as a tool for social change and grass roots organizing. They moved poems back onto stages and street corners using call and response, musical instruments like drums and other attention-getting theatrical tools to capture the attention of popular culture. Many say that socially conscious poets like Gil Scott Heron, Amiri Baraka, and Sonia Sanchez inspired the birth of hip hop in the late 1970s and early 80s. In turn, as community centered, progressive hip hop was commercialized into modern rap, many have returned to performance poetry for a message focused form of expression.

This brings us to the current state of spoken word art. Most agree on a basic definition, that in its contemporary form, spoken word is a poetic expression designed to be performed and or recorded by the author for an audience. As a poetic expression, spoken word art contains traits of poetry and its literary elements, but evidently a clear distinction does exist. Generally, literary poetry is recognized as a written art with aural qualities while spoken word is primarily an oral form. The basic unit of a literary poem is the line, while the basic unit of a spoken word poem is breath. Both art forms can rely on an array of technical literary elements. Spoken word however necessitates accessibility and immediacy. The audience is expected to follow along with the performer in real time without the option (in the case of a live performance) of re-reading and even researching a line. While both literary and spoken word poetry aim for memorability, the latter hinges on immediate comprehension.

Sharing the term ‘poem’ often elicits compare/contrast conversations surrounding literary and performance poetry. Author presence and anticipated consumption is a crucial element of spoken word art. The performance aspect implies theatrical, possibly nonverbal communication through movement and inhabiting of space within a performance area. The author/performer’s physical presence and delivery of the poem is a definitive part of the artistic gesture. The performance poet seeks to connect with his or her audience in a way that often blurs the space between the poet and the ‘I’ or speaker in the poem. The performance appears to be confessional, while literary poems are not necessarily connected to the oral reading of their authors. The reader is empowered to interpret ‘page’ or literary poems. Spoken word artists perform their own work, often from memory as with a script. They interpret the tone and pace through their presentation which empowers the artist as an agent of his or her culture. The contemporary performer as cultural change agent harkens back to the griots and Black Arts Movement poets of the past.

As with most creative expressions, spoken word art is derived from age old practices but continues to evolve and respond to present day concerns and aesthetics. In this exciting time in performance poetry’s development, we have nationally recognized artists, influential venues such as HBO’s Def Poetry Jam, and most importantly, the accessibility of spoken word that always welcomes new voices. We hear their words in coffee houses, after school clubs, national media, cell phone ring tones and academic conferences. Whether we trace the genre’s progress through cultural, industrial or academic considerations, it is clear that spoken word art has carved out its own artistic niche and continues to affect and be affected by the world in which it exists.

Read more about the author of this article, Nashville poet Stephanie Pruitt, on page 11.
Bringing People Together
by Eli Feghali, President of Vanderbilt Spoken Word

Spoken Word is an accessible art form. It requires no special equipment, only the courage to write from your soul and to perform in front of others. While these are no easy feats, they are skills that can be developed in an open environment. The only necessary precondition is that people come together and support one another. When that happens, new writers can feel comfortable to share their work and to grow as Spoken Word artists.

In fact, most people come to Spoken Word with little to no experience. That is of little significance because everyone has the inherent ability to write and perform. Spoken Word is an art form without prejudice because anyone has the ability to take part in it. Regardless of race, ethnicity, political view, age, or class background, Spoken Word provides the creative medium to share our life experiences.

It is poetry for the next generation of writers who relate to the written word differently than those who came before. Unlike standard poetry, Spoken Word is meant to be consumed visually and aurally by an audience. It is a performance art which adds a unique element to how it’s written and conceptualized by artists. You must write to perform. This is part of what makes Spoken Word so exciting. It’s not dry words on a page, but rather a theatrical performance of the soul!

Even more importantly, Spoken Word is a tool for change. It speaks truth to power, gives a voice to the voiceless, and most importantly it brings people together. When you get artists together who speak from their hearts about what moves them or has shaped their opinions about the world, you invariably draw a diverse and tolerant audience. Accordingly, Spoken Word provides an opportunity to speak about difficult issues in front of a wide range of people and perspectives. A good Spoken Word artist is always trying to start a dialogue to make people think.

Hip Hop
by Eli Feghali, President of Vanderbilt Spoken Word

When we speak about the relationship between Hip Hop and Spoken Word, we are not speaking about popular rap music on the radio. We are speaking about a diverse cultural phenomenon that has influenced music, dance, dress and even politics. As it concerns Spoken Word, Hip Hop was there from the beginning and it remains a strong influence today – from the rhyme schemes to the performance styles.

For example, many professional rappers are also very much poets. Although rap has a bad reputation because of the negative images it portrays on the mainstream media, there is history of Hip Hop being a positive force in our communities. For example, current artists like Sage Francis, Brother Ali, Immortal Technique, and Shad K use their lyrical content to tell true stories and to spread uplifting messages. They are also skilled in the use of language, word play, and rhythm – all important elements in Spoken Word poetry.

In general, Hip Hop should not be feared, but rather embraced. It has captured the interest and imagination of youth around the world, and it offers a style that is unique and self-empowering. It is dynamic, exciting, and it provides a medium though which people can relate to one another across the lines that usually keep us separated.
Meanings and new applications

Define the word “mayhem.”
What is verbal mayhem?
What are the positive aspects of mayhem?

Define “slam.”
Why is it called “slam poetry”?
How can “slam” be a positive adjective?

Spoken Word tricks of the trade
Review the definitions below of the “tricks” (also known as poetry terms!) and listen for them at the performance.

Aliteration ~ a pattern of sound that includes the repetition of the beginning consonant sounds of words, as in “And sings a solitary song…”

Assonance ~ the repetition of similar vowel sounds in a sentence or a line of poetry or prose, as in “I rose and told him of my woe…”

Consonance ~ the repetition at close intervals of the final consonant sounds, especially of accented syllables, as in “He struck a streak of bad luck…”

Internal rhymes ~ a rhyme within a line of verse, as in “Whiles all the night through fog-smoke white…”

Ironic ~ the use of words to convey a meaning that is the opposite or different from the literal meaning.

Onomatopoeia ~ The use of words to imitate the sounds they describe, such as buzz and crack.

Word Play ~ a subtle or clever exchange of words, repartee or punning.

These excerpts are from THE MAYHEM POETS TEACHER GUIDE, with terrific activity suggestions for before and after the show.

**LEARNING GOALS:**
- Students will actively listen to understand spoken-word poetry
- Students will understand why poets write, and some of the topics that inspire them
- Students will understand the cultural influences that led to the rise of spoken-word poetry
- Students will understand the elements and principles of spoken-word poetry

**BEFORE THE PROGRAM**
1. Find out what students know about slam or spoken-word poetry. Ask how many of them are familiar with Def Poetry Jam, or how many listen to rap music. You may also bring in some examples (listed in the “Resources” section) to listen to as a class. Ask students to compare spoken-word poetry to written poetry. Is there a difference in style or tone? Are there differences in rhyme structure or meter?
2. Explore the differences between Standard Written English and colloquial speech. What can you do or say in colloquial English that would be unacceptable in written English? Would they expect to see some of these differences in the performance, or would they expect the poets to use Standard Written English in their performance? Why or why not?
3. Have students write a short “boast” rap about themselves and perform it for the class. A boast is a traditional hip-hop form that gives students the opportunity to write about themselves, and explore why they are special or different from their peers. Most students will be familiar with this form if they listen to rap music.

**AFTER THE PROGRAM:**
1. Discuss students’ impressions of the performance as a class. What were they surprised by? What do they remember? What was their favorite part? Have students write a poem in response to one of the poems they heard in the performance. Consider having them perform for the class or sending their responses to the artists.
2. Work with your class to organize a school-wide poetry slam. This is easier than you’d think; a great way to energize the whole school community, and celebrate students’ hard work. You and your students can decide whether the slam will be competitive or not, and can organize prizes for the winners, or participants. You need to find a program M.C. and a scorekeeper (with a calculator and list of participants) if you are going to choose a winner. Often, slam judges are chosen randomly right before the competition begins. Judges can be students, teachers, parents, or staff. All they need is paper and a big marker, with the instructions to score poetry from 1-10 (a 1 means “this is hardly even a poem” and a 10 means “this is the best thing I’ve ever heard.”) You can choose to register performers ahead of time, or have students sign up once they get to the slam. Some great extensions include publishing the poetry that is performed, and getting the community involved by sponsoring prizes, or advertising in a slam program. If you are not ready for a school-wide slam, you can easily host a class slam with students judging each other.
3. Work with students to explore another genre of performance poetry – Shakespeare. Choose your favorite monologue or soliloquy and print it out in a large font (18 pts.). Then, cut the paper so that there is only one or two lines of text on each piece. You need to have one sheet (and only one) for each student in your class. If necessary, you can break one line into two so that each piece contains one thought or idea. Have students stand in a circle and give each student a piece of the speech. Then, have students read their line, one-by-one, around the circle. Encourage students to play with their line and try reading it in different ways. After going around several times, ask students to add a gesture or movement to their line as they read. Then, ask them to paraphrase their line in their own language. Not only will this help students understand Shakespeare’s language, it will help them understand the elements of performance.
Force a Metaphor (or Simile)

Objective: Students will create metaphors and similes.

Goal: Students will play with language in ways that are serious and sarcastic, silly and ironic.

Make sure students know the difference between metaphors and similes. Share with them that poets and certainly spoken word artists, like the Mayhem Poets, use language in inventive and surprising ways. You have to practice your mind muscles and feel free to experiment a little in order to use words in new combinations that catch people’s attention.

- Set-up the activity as a quick-thinking game. Students don’t have to be brilliant; they only have to try. Answers can be bizarre, funny, or meaningful.

- As a class, quickly brainstorm a list of adjectives and a list of animals or objects. Divide the class into two teams.

- Each student will choose something from one list to challenge a student on the other team. That student must make a metaphor or simile on the spot, filling in the sentence:

  “Life is a _____ because_____.” or “Life is like_____because_____.”

- Only allow 30 seconds. If students can’t come up with a metaphor allow them to have a lifeline, picking another student from their team to help them.

- Keep a running score. Students who can get a metaphor or simile by themselves get five points for their team. Each life-line subtracts a point.

OR

- Divide the class into partners.

- Each student will choose something from one list to challenge their partner. The partner must make a metaphor or simile on the spot, filling in the sentence:

  “Life is a _____ because_____.” or “Life is like_____because_____.”

- Only allow one minute before they must switch partners. They have to share their favorite response with the class.

Extension: For an in-class or at-home assignment, ask students to write a comparison as they have in the game above, taking more time to think it through and make it meaningful. What metaphor or simile truly describes life in their opinion?

metaphor: a type of figurative language in which a statement is made that says that one thing is something else but, literally, it is not. In connecting one object, event, or place, to another, a metaphor can uncover new and intriguing qualities of the original thing that we may not normally notice or even consider important. Metaphoric language is used in order to realize a new and different meaning. As an effect, a metaphor functions primarily to increase stylistic colorfulness and variety. Metaphor is a great contributor to poetry when the reader understands a likeness between two essentially different things.

With thanks to www.uncp.edu.
Objective: Students will recite poetic lines and analyze their beats.

Goal: To explore the music inherent in poetry and begin to find relationship to the beats of favorite contemporary music.

Remind students that all poetry and even prose and speech have their own music. Usually people most notice the beat, but poetry has musical texture and a kind of lilt that is melodic. Exploring the beat and music of language is central to the work of spoken word artists.

Look through some of the poems that students have studied during the year. Find a “famous” passage (like the examples below,) and almost any type and number of poetic feet will work. Consistent verses are easier, but you can do it with more complicated ones as well.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FROST</th>
<th>POE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The woods are lovely, dark and deep. But I have promises to keep, And miles to go before I sleep, And miles to go before I sleep. from “Stopping By the Woods on a Snowy Evening”</td>
<td>Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary, Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore, While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping, As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door. “ ’Tis some visitor,” I muttered, “tapping at my chamber door — Only this, and nothing more.” from “The Raven”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BLAKE</th>
<th>SHAKESPEARE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tyger! Tyger! burning bright In the forests of the night, What immortal hand or eye Dare frame thy fearful symmetry? from “Songs of Innocence and Experience”</td>
<td>Weary with toil, I haste me to my bed, The dear repose for limbs with travel tired, But then begins a journey in my head To work my mind, when body's work's expired. from Sonnet 27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⇒ Ask for a few volunteers to try reading a chosen passage in a monotone with no stresses, no pitch changes in their voices (ups or downs at the end of lines) and giving each syllable equal spacing. Monotone reading is actually very hard to do and still will not completely destroy the beat of the lines.

⇒ Now ask a student to read the passage normally (and expressively as possible) so as to clear the students’ ears of the monotone.

⇒ Ask for a few more volunteers to “read” the lines by replacing words with the syllables “da-duh.” Encourage them to make it feel musical and not plodding. How can the whole class help them?

⇒ Ask them to try tapping out the beat with their feet, or with just fingertips on their desks, or clapping it. Once the beat is established, add the words of the passage.

⇒ Ask for a few last volunteers to present the passage with a hip-hop, rap or even rock-and-roll beat. Encourage them to try to use the rhythms to emphasize the meaning of the words. What rhythms work best?

⇒ Discuss the contrasts in the beats and musicality of the passages when students change the way they speak the lines. Encourage students to listen not only to the meaning of the words of the Mayhem Poets, but also to the music of their words in the rhythms they create.
Resources from THE MAYHEM POETS TEACHER GUIDE

On the web:
www.poetryslam.com – general info, history, etc.
www.slampapi.com – more info from the father of slam.
www.brickeny.net – for students to submit and post their poetry online.
www.webengishteacher.com/poetryslam.html - a great resource for organizing a classroom slam; useful lesson plans for language arts teachers—also includes links to other useful sites that house poetry slam ideas.
www.poetryteachers.com/index.html - describes tips for teaching poetry and having your students perform poetry.

In the library:

Resources here in Nashville

www.vandyspokenword.com - the Vanderbilt student group that presents Spoken Word performances in partnership with several Nashville organizations.

www.youthspeaksnashville.org - a great organization that helps Nashville students enter the world of writing and self-expression through spoken word art and slam poetry.

Stephanie Pruitt is a poet and community teaching artist interested in rooting out the everyday, interior moments of revelation and dot-to-dot-connecting truth. The Nashville, TN native is working on her MFA in Creative Writing at Vanderbilt University. She was voted Poet of the Year by SpokenVizions Magazine and has given spoken word art performances and poetry workshops in over 200 venues nationwide. Stephanie is an artist in residence with the TN Arts Commission and co-chair of the board of YouthSpeaks Nashville -- a nonprofit organization committed to creating engaging literary and performance art experiences for local youth. Her poetry CD Choice Words and multiple publications have met critical acclaim. Stephanie’s work has been called “high art with a hearty dose of biscuit sopping goodness.”

Stephanie is the author of the “History of Spoken Word” on pages 7-8.