

## Rhythm and Music in Poetry, Part III: Slam or Spoken Word Poetry

By: Elizabeth Brown

**Education Level:** Junior High (can be adapted for Upper level Elementary, High School)

**Genre:** Poetry

**Time frame:** One class period (although I recommend that this be extended to at least two class periods to allow time for student performances)

**Objective:** To think about the music of poetry and write and perform with music in mind.

**Prior knowledge and skills:** None, although ideally, this lesson could follow Rhythm and Music in Poetry, Part [I](#) and [II](#)

**Required materials:** Writing materials, audiovisual player for videos

**Literary model:** "[Gentrification](#)" by Urban Word, "[Cat Poem](#)" by Get Lit LA, "[Slam Poem about Bullying](#)," by Aiya

If extending this lesson into two, the following are also good videos. You could reintroduce the idea of using "found" poetry—overheard conversations, emergency bulletins, scientific facts, etc.—for your slam poem. (You might want to bring/hand out examples of these—I've included my handouts at the end of this lesson.)

[Poetry Everywhere: "One Boy Told Me" by Naomi Shihab Nye](#) (found poetry; dialogue)

["Hot Gumbo Pot" by Meta-Four Houston](#)

Any slam poems by Solli Raphael (available on YouTube)

### Sequence of activities:

#### 5-10 minutes

Give a brief review of what constitutes a spoken word or slam poem. Poems are three minutes max. No props are used. Usually, slam poems are memorized, and judged competitively. (I chose not to require memorization or competitive judging, but perhaps you could expand this lesson to include them, if desired.) A slam poem can be performed singly, or in a group. Audience participation is welcomed.

Briefly mention (or write on the board ahead of time) the techniques found in slam poetry: rhyme, use of opposites, word play, the repetition of a word or phrase. You also include questions, commands, advice, scientific or historical facts, statistics, current events, dialogue, found words or phrases (from an emergency services message, from a bulletin, poster, etc.).

Almost anything can go into a slam poem.

**15 minutes**

Watch and discuss the videos.

**20-25 minutes**

Have the students work on a slam poem of their own. They can work together or in a group.

Optional: play this background music quietly as the students compose: [Lofi: music for study](#)

**15 minutes**

Give an opportunity for students to perform their poems for the class. Remind the audience to show appreciation!

Below are resources that students can use to write a slam poem.

**Facts and statistics can add interest and depth to your poems. A few examples:**

Babies have about 300 bones at birth, more than the 206 an adult typically has, as some bones fuse together during growth.

Over a lifetime, a person produces enough saliva to fill two swimming pools.

The tongue is considered the strongest muscle in the human body.

Rats and mice will "laugh" (make high-frequency chirps) when they are tickled.

A single cloud can weigh over a million pounds.

Humans share about 60% of their DNA with bananas.

Bananas are naturally radioactive due to the presence of potassium-40, though the amount is harmless.

The average color of the universe is a beige color called "Cosmic Latte."

Honey never spoils because of its low water content and acidic pH.

Grasshoppers have ears located on their bellies, not their heads.

Sharks are responsible for very few human deaths each year. Mosquitoes, however, cause over 700,000 deaths annually by spreading diseases.

Globally, 132 million babies were born in 2024. 62 million people died in 2024.

The top three leading causes of death in the U.S. are heart disease, cancer, and unintentional injuries.

Air pollution counts for 1 in 8 deaths worldwide.

The human brain itself cannot feel pain, though it processes pain signals from all over the body.

**Examples of emergency bulletins** (change or add in your own names, locations, situations):

Floodwaters are approaching Wood City and will hit two blocks on both sides of Elm Creek from Hwy 110 to Maple Road. Starting at 11 am. People outside will be washed downstream. The water will be above rooftops. Move two blocks plus from the creek now and be there no later than 6:00 pm to avoid the flood. This message expires at 11:00 pm, May 15, 2017.

Aitkin County Sheriff Advises Take Shelter Now—Chlorine Gas in this area until 4:30 pm.

This is [Agency] with a mandatory evacuation order for [location]. Take the following protective actions and leave immediately; 1. Gather all family members. 2. Gather all pets. 3. Gather only essential items. 4. Be sure to bring essential medications with you. 5. Turn off all appliances and lights in your home 6. Lock your home. The evacuation route is: [Evacuation Route]. An Evacuation Center is open at [Name and Location of Evacuation Center]. For more information, please tune to local radio and television stations, visit [url], or call [###-###-####].