

Spoken Word Poetry and Performance: Lesson Plan

Using Oral History & Historical Artifacts As Poet Voices

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Phase 1: Brainstorm artifacts of historical event; each student poet select one artifact to write about; share drafts and together choose artifact with strongest imagery to use as voice of collective poem

2 sessions, teacher & students (30-45 min each.) Note: student teams of 2-4 work best for editing and performing the team's poetry

1. For 1st meeting, think about the historical event—visualize the place, the time, the setting.
 - a. Make a list of artifacts that would be deemed synonymous with the historical event.
 - b. Each student in the team should pick ONE of the artifacts and write about it:
 - i. How is it symbolic?
 - ii. How is it like a metaphor?
 - iii. What other words are synonymous for the word you chose?
2. At next meeting, bring in printed copies of what you wrote (no required length, rhyme, etc.) and read aloud to team:
 - a. All students read aloud in turn
 - b. Then team chooses one of the artifacts they all want to explore & write about in more depth.
3. Repeat same prompts in step 1 above, but everybody is doing it.

Phase 2: Select strongest lines from individual poems

1 session, teacher & students (30-45 min)

4. At next meeting, everyone brings printed copies and take turns reading out loud.
 - a. Everyone is equipped with highlighter
 - b. After the read-around, each student highlights the lines they like most in each person's work.

Phase 3: Edit into single, combined poem

Teacher editing session (allow 2-4 hrs.) Note: editing can be done by student team, as experience in genre grows

5. Then teacher takes the chosen lines and creates a single poem. The teacher should keep the following things in mind when constructing the poem:
 - a. Reads in under four minutes
 - b. Is built around one strong clear artifact
 - c. Includes words/phrases/images from oral history of eyewitnesses
 - d. Remember! Use words that listener can see, hear, smell, touch, taste!

Phase 4: Voice the Edited Poem; Orchestrate speaking parts and tone

1-2 sessions, teacher and students (total of 1-2 hrs)

6. At the next meeting, the teacher brings the combined script and team reads through. Each poet reads the lines from their draft that made the cut.
 - a. Listen for parts of the poem that are too long, too choppy, too short, disjointed
 - b. Listen for sensations
 - c. Listen for transitions—smooth, abrupt, confusing; can solve with orchestration and choreography
 - d. Listen to suggestion for possible edits. Vote as a group whether or not to make adjustments to the poem.

- e. After the final version of the poem is agreed upon, work with students to select who will say which lines in the poem.

Phase 5: Memorize poem

Students work on own; allow 2-3 weeks time, ideally

7. Each student memorizes their parts in poem.
 - a. Remember: Be aware of the real people in the actual events whose life experience you are trying to capture.
 - b. Use tone and tempo to let listeners hear the experience

Phase 6: Rehearse and choreograph poem

3-6 sessions, teacher & students (allow 2-3 weeks time)

7. After students memorize the poem, now it is time for them to rehearse the poem. As the students rehearse and get comfortable performing with each other, ask them to be looking for points in the poem where they can partake in synchronized movements (choreography) that will enhance what they are simultaneously saying in the poem.
8. While rehearsing, orchestrate the lines (who says what, how many say it-- remember: the longer the line, the harder it is to say in unison.) Then choreograph the lines (what gesture, movement goes with different lines)
9. Continue to rehearse the poem and choreography until students master the performance.

NOTE: Teachers are encouraged to use this lesson plan to generate spoken word poetry and performances by their students using oral history and historical artifacts in their own community. Use of the lesson plan in print in whole or part is subject to copyright standards and requires written permission.