

Norman Nawrocki – The Spoken Word, workshop April 2008

The Association of Teachers of English of Quebec offers subsidies to help sponsor such projects as workshops and author visits. Thank you ATEQ. M. Eva

A couple of years ago I was fortunate to spot Norman Nawrocki's name on the MELS Culture in Schools program. I was looking for an entertaining way to enlist student's appreciation of poetry and all the while have them see the importance of the spoken word through music. Norman offered such a workshop. I had had the pleasure of working with Norman in 2006 when he gave a short story writing workshop to my students. It was a success as evidenced through their descriptive writings. I also attended a spoken word evening where Norman used music – he plays a mean violin – a drum machine, and put his stories to music. This eclectic use of literature interested me and I asked my secondary 4 and 5 students whether they would like to have such a workshop. No coaxing was necessary – I have yet to hear a young person reject music or a chance to do something different. The workshop aptly took place in April, during Poetry Month.

Since Norman is an accomplished musician and spoken word performer, he was able to offer students a glimpse into the many uses of music, other than the listening phase – which in some cases may be passive. In preparation for Norman's visit, students chose poems that "spoke to them", or as many did composed original ones. Our school participated in the Poem In Your Pocket day and so students spent time creating or searching for favourite lines to share with others. They were also encouraged to bring in selections of favourite music – preferably instrumental, or even bring in their instruments.

Norman introduced the concept of spoken word in performance art, and demonstrated various techniques for performing their pieces with appropriate melodies. After the initial stops and giggles, students learned how to set their writing to beats and music, and how to read and perform that writing – either as solo acts or duets. With Norman's feedback and coaching, everyone took turns sharing their performance work. Some relevant themes of concern to students ranged from concerns about bullying, racism, poverty, environmental issues, and relationships. From the romantic and idyllic to the passionate and funny, from lyric to narrative and rap, the poems entertained. However, more importantly, students had an opportunity to see that the written lines can be as vibrant as music and its message can be powerfully delivered.

Writer Bio: Norman Nawrocki

Genre: Creative non-fiction, poetry, theatre

Speciality: Short fiction

As a Montréal artist in the Québec government's program, 'Culture in the Schools,' Norman tours the province teaching students (kindergarten to senior high school) how to use pens, pencils, imaginations and their own natural talents for writing, acting, making music, and performing. Norman Nawrocki is a multi-disciplinary writer/"cabaret artist" with an international reputation. He has 5 books of poetry and short fiction, and is included in numerous anthologies. His texts also appear in 50 albums of spoken word and music, in theatre musicals, in his many one-man cabarets, and in film soundtracks. He has written plays for CBC Radio, and, since 1985, he has performed his spoken word work live on the stage, radio and TV across Canada, the United States and Europe. He also gives creativity workshops for community groups and lectures at universities and colleges. His newest book of English poetry was published this summer 2007, and his last book of short stories has now been translated and published in French and Italian. He launched his newest book in Italy, at the Rome Book Fair in December 2007.

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