

## **The Roots of Spoken Word**

1. Jazz poetry
  - a. Poetry inspired by Jazz, using the rhythms of Jazz or having Jazz as its primary subject
  - b. Plays prominent role during Harlem Renaissance (1920s), Beat Poetry (1940/50s) & Black Arts Movement (1960s)
2. Dub Poetry
  - a. Originating in 1970s Jamaica
  - b. Performed in Jamaican Patois (Jamaican dialect) with pride in contrast to the nation's policy of its stigmatization
  - c. Influenced by Reggae (Poems performed with Reggae bands or to Reggae instrumentals, known as dubs)
  - d. Voice of the community and its political and social justice concerns
3. Slam
  - a. Competitive Poetry event/movement founded by Marc Kelly Smith in 1980s Chicago
  - b. Poets are judged by random audience members, giving poems scores from 1-10 over several rounds
  - c. Some poetry Slams have regular competitions that culminate in the formation of poetry teams for those who score highest over the season
  - d. Poetry teams meet at National and International competitions (i.e. Canadian Festival of Spoken Word, yearly festival being held in Montreal this year from Nov. 4-9, 2013)
  - e. Slam became very popular in the 90s and is seeing resurgence with the Youth Slam movement
4. Beat Poetry
  - a. Bohemian counter culture 1940/50s American poetry movement centered in NYC and California
  - b. Themes include freeing poetry from tradition and convention, the influence of the burgeoning Bebop Jazz scene, expansion of one's consciousness through hallucinogenic drugs and eastern religions

## **The Merits of Spoken Word as Teaching Tool**

### Spoken Word:

- Presents poetry in a language and style to which youth can relate. It is current, vibrant and flexible.
- Provides an excellent opportunity for student to express their feelings and concerns as they navigate through adolescence. It is a chance to ask them what they think and feel and for them to respond with honesty and candor in a form in which they can feel comfortable
- Serves as an outlet to deal with difficult issues such as racism, sexism, identity, personal history, trauma, etc.
- Provides a platform to discuss current events, politics and voice one's opinions
- Allows students to find their voice with authentic style and character

## **What's next?**

# **A Teacher's Spoken Word Resource**

Fertile Themes for Spoken Word:

- *Identity*
  - Who am I, how do I define/identify myself
  - How am I defined/identified by others: my peers, parents, teachers, strangers
  - How do these perceptions shape how I see myself
  - Exploring family history
- *Popular Culture, Politics, Justice*
  - The use of current events as opportunities for critical thinking and as a means for students to voice their opinions
- *Love*
  - The exploration of attitudes towards love, relationships and the expectations and conflicts that can arise when dealing with love
- *Hopes & Dreams*
  - What are your students' short and long term goals?
  - What do they want to be when they grow up?

## **The Spoken Word - List of Resources**

### *1. Books*

- a. Spoken Word Workbook: Inspiration from Poets who Teach (Banff Centre Press, 2011) – Sheri D Wilson
- b. Take the Mic – The Art of Performance Poetry, Slam & Spoken Word (Sourcebooks MediaFusion, 2009) – Marc Kelly Smith
- c. Great Black North (Frontenac Press, 2013) – Valerie Mason-John & Kevan Anthony Cameron
  - Anthology of Black Canadian Poets
- d. Talking Book (Culumus Press, 2006)– Kaie Kellough & Jason Selman
  - Anthology of Poems, Song & Rap Lyrics from Montreal's Kalm Unity Vibe Collective
- e. Impure, Reinventing the Word: The Theory, Practice & Oral History of Spoken Word in Montreal (Conundrum Press, 2001) – Victoria Stanton & Vincent Tinguely

### *2. DVD*

- a. Brave New Voices
- b. Slam Nation
- c. Def Poetry Jam

### *3. Poets of Interest*

- a. Jazz: Langston Hughes, Ted Joans
- b. Dub: Miss Lou (Louise Bennett) Linton Kwesi Johnson, Mikey Smith, Afua Cooper, D'bi Young
- c. Slam: Marc Kelly Smith (Founder of Slam), Saul Williams
- d. Beat: Kaufman, Ginsberg, Kerouac
- e. Hip Hop Forefathers: Last Poets, Gil Scott Heron
- f. Canadian: Shauntay Grant, The Recipe, Mary Pinkoski, El Jones
- g. Montreal: MC June, Fabrice Koffy, Queen Ka, Deanna Smith, Kaie Kellough