How to Plan a Poetry Slam

Introduction

The following rules and suggestions are for 'in class' poetry slams. It is a shortened version of an actual slam, and is for your use as a class, not as a school-wide activity.

If you would like to organize a poetry slam for your entire school, you can find the rules for a full-blown slam at http://torontopoetryslam.com/slam-rules/.

Guides for a Poetry Slam

- Poems must be original.
- Each poem should be a maximum of three minutes. There is no minimum time.
- No props, costumes, or musical instruments. Overtly dramatic use of clothing included. Otherwise you lose a point.
- Recite poems from memory or read from the page.
- Team pieces (more than one performer) are fine. The poem being performed must still be an original and the author (one student) must still be at the centre of the performance.
- All styles are welcomed and encouraged: a capella hip-hop, theatrical monologues, literary poetry, sound poetry, dub poetry, rants, haikus, power raps, etc. Whatever you would have fun doing!
- The delivery of the piece is just as important as the content of the poem. Use your voice and your whole body to perform!
- Chose performers randomly. For example, draw names from a hat to determine the order of performance and select the performers.
- As in any performance, those performing should be treated with respect. If you need to leave during a performance, please wait for an appropriate pause in the action (e.g., in between poems).

Guides for Judging

- Poets are rated both on content and performance by five judges selected at random from the audience (i.e., students not performing that day).
- The audience is encouraged to influence the judges with applause or boos.
- The score keeper keeps track of the length of the performance. If the poem goes longer than 3 minutes, there's a ten second grace period, after which the poet will suffer a .5 penalty for every 10 seconds over 3:10.

- The highest and lowest scores for each poem are tossed and the remaining three averaged by the score keeper, who records all the scores for the MC.

Preparing for a Poetry Slam

- Choose an MC.
- MC asks for volunteers to perform.
- MC asks for a volunteer "sacrificial poet." The sacrificial poet goes first, so the judges can have someone to practice their judging on and set a baseline for the rest of the scores. The sacrificial poet isn't part of the slam competition, but serves as an opening act.
- MC draws names of poets performing that day to determine the order of the presentations.
- MC picks 5 judges from the remaining students and a score keeper.
- Each judge will need blank paper and a pen or marker.
- The score keeper will also need blank paper and a pen as well as a calculator and a watch to keep track of how long each performance is and take points off if necessary.
- MC introduces judges, and each poet before they perform.

MC's Score Keeping Role

- After the sacrificial poet and then after each performance, the MC gives the judges a few seconds to come up with their scores, then counts to three, and asks the judges to hold up their scores simultaneously. Then the scorekeeper throws out the top and bottom scores and averages the other three.
- The MC announces the final score, and introduces the next performer.
- The MC announces the slam winner at the end.