

Educator Resource

slamm 

**raw poetic explorations into moral
intelligence for grades 5 through 8**

A MENDEL ART GALLERY – ART FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE PROGRAM

written and designed by
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Raw poetic explorations into Moral Intelligence for grades 5-8

Every spring, the Mendel Art Gallery presents a large-scale project that involves Saskatoon's youth in order to establish long-term relationships with this segment of the population and create a forum where their views on the world can be highlighted through creative activity.

SlammED—presented in spring 2008—is a project that utilizes slam and hip-hop-inspired poetry to explore issues that are relevant to youth while allowing participants to gain valuable skills in poetry writing and performance. The partners in this project believe that having knowledge, practice, and confidence in the written and spoken language is essential to the self-empowerment of their students.

SlammED encouraged youth—from Saskatoon's North Park Wilson, St. John, and Pleasant Hill Community Schools—to express themselves using their vernacular through a series of film screenings and discussions; warm-up activities; a visit to a provocative Mendel exhibition; workshops with hip-hop artist Eekwol and Slam poet Holly Luhnig; hip-hop lessons with defSOL productions; school semi-final competitions; and finals at the Off-Broadway Dinner Theatre. This project's legacy is organized in the following educator resource.

We are indebted to Natalie Kallio, Project Intern and Program Coordinator, for writing and designing this educator resource, and for seeing the project through to completion.

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Note: At the time of writing this package, all web site references were accurate. We apologize if some sites are no longer available.

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SlammED EDUCATOR RESOURCE: INTRODUCTION

"[Slam is] the democratization of verse."

—Bob Holman, poetry activist and former slammaster of the Nuuyorican Poets Café

SlammED utilizes slam and rap-inspired poetry to explore moral intelligences through a critical, youth-centred pedagogy. SlammED argues for a concrete and ethical understanding of art—one that requires response, action, and performance. This educator resource helps you build structures around multicultural and class discourse in your classroom, to unveil deeper levels of artistic, media, and moral literacy. SlammED involves making connections among poetry, performance, and visual arts in your classroom community.

SlammED encourages youth to express themselves using their own vernacular through a series of film screenings and discussions, warm-up activities, poetry and performance activities, gallery visits (or other visual arts-related activities), workshops with artists in your community, peer and individual mentoring and workshopping, and semi-final competitions, culminating in a SlammED Slam-Off.

Grade Level

- recommended for grades 5-12

Duration

- 4-6 weeks (in multiple curriculum areas)

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The following resource provides an adaptable outline for an interdisciplinary unit on slam poetry that can be utilized in English, Language Arts, Drama, Art, Media Studies, and interdisciplinary and general courses. This program of study also promotes students' abilities to define feelings and emotions as a means of understanding and guiding behaviour.

Curriculum-based Outcomes

SlammED can be adapted to meet many of the expectations, learning outcomes, strands, skills, and knowledges in your curriculum in Language Arts, English, Literature, Drama, Telemedia, Fine Arts (Visual/Music/Dance), and Physical Education, as well as religious and ethics-based curricula, for primary and secondary grades. Students explore forms and history of poetry, rhythm and words, theatre and performance art, and kinaesthetics.

The following is a snapshot of some of the key curriculum strands, expectations, essential learnings, and skills¹ developed by activities in this resource.

¹ The curricular language used here is adapted from the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education's Curriculum Guides & Learning Resources, available at <http://www.learning.gov.sk.ca/curr-rscs>.

Essential Learnings²

- Creative and Critical Thinking
- From Understanding to Action
- Communication
- Personal and Social Values and Skills
- Independent Learning

Skill Development

- speaking, listening, writing, reading, viewing, and representing
- critical and creative thinking
- responding critically and creatively to literature, texts, images, sounds, performances, and personal and political events
- exploration, development and expression of ideas (through visual art, poetry, performance, dance, and other media)
- cooperative and collaborative learning
- reflection, interpretation, and critique
- develop interpersonal communication skills
- active democratic citizenship, decision-making, and conflict-resolution
- integrate a variety of media and disciplines
- develop moral intelligence (see below)

Students are expected to:

- learn about the origins, development, and contemporary practice of slam poetry
- observe and critique slam poetry (written and in performance)
- write and perform original poetry
- be active participants in the process
- gain knowledge and understanding of poetic form, devices, and figurative language
- learn and apply performance techniques
- make connections between oral and written poetry, performing arts, drama, dance, popular music, movement, and visual art
- develop a practical understanding of the writing process
- learn how to give and receive constructive criticism
- participate in the planning and execution of the SlammED Slam-Off

Moral Intelligence

SlammED responds to student-centred pedagogy and current research on the benefits of developing moral intelligence. On her website, leading moral intelligence researcher Dr. Michele Borba explains that moral intelligence "is the capacity to understand right from wrong; it means to have strong ethical convictions and to act on them so that one behaves in the right and honourable way."³ Moral intelligence pedagogy focuses on developing and

² Adapted from the Ministry of Education's *Understanding the Common Essential Learnings: A Handbook for Teachers* (Regina, SK: Saskatchewan Education) <<http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/policy/cels/index.html>>.

³ Michele Borba, "The Step-By-Step Plan to Building Moral Intelligence," *Dr. Michele Borba: Nurturing Kids Hearts and Minds*, <<http://www.moralintelligence.com/Pages/7virtues.htm>>.

nurturing seven essential virtues: empathy, conscience, self-control, respect, kindness, tolerance, and fairness.⁴

SlammED nurtures these virtues in multiple and overlapping ways.

- In expressing themselves through poetry, students develop an emotional vocabulary in a meaningful way. Their thoughts, fears, beliefs, doubts, and feelings are not only put down on paper but publicly shared—nurturing their sensitivity to and empathy for others.
- Taking the time to *think* about thoughts and actions, and writing them down, exercises students' consciences, affording opportunities to consider motivations and options (e.g. why do I think this about that? could I have acted differently? what is right and wrong?).
- Peer workshopping and other collaborative activities (e.g. deliberating about judging criteria) foster respect for others; in this, the educator is also modelling respect by entrusting students with decision-making (relinquishing some power and stepping back as a member of a democratic community, not the dictatorial "decision-maker").
- Because all students must share their poems (i.e. "put themselves out there"), students recognise each other as similarly vulnerable—fostering mutual respect and kindness toward each other. For instance, in establishing the rules for audience members, students unequivocally agree that booing and derisive remarks are unacceptable and everyone deserves positive reinforcement and encouragement.
- Given the opportunity to exercise their democratic muscles, students display their often finely-honed sense of fairness (i.e. we need to listen to the logic behind those echoing complaints of "that's not fair").⁵
- While students learn to empathise with each other, they also develop an awareness of the diversity of thoughts, feelings, and experiences within their classroom community. This nurtures tolerance. Many of the student poems (see [Appendix II](#)) directly tackle prejudice and the pain caused by discrimination; others poke fun at or mock stereotypes, revealing them to be unfounded and, often, ridiculous.

SlammED promotes the ability to define and articulate feelings—through self-reflection, peer sharing, collaboration, conflict resolution, and building trusting, collegial classroom communities—as a means of understanding and guiding one's behaviour.

Please note that while we focus on Moral Intelligence, these are by no means the only values nurtured through the SlammED program. Whether you are working from a character education⁶ perspective, trying to instil your own board or school's values and mandates, even doing conflict-resolution or critical thinking, you will find that the activities will meet multiple objectives and are adaptable to your needs.

⁴ Ibid. This page includes Borba's explanation of each of these virtues and recommended steps toward and approaches to nurturing these values in your students and school community.

⁵ In his seminal work, reflecting on his students at Summerhill, A.S. Neill was fascinated by his students' great (and, to him, surprising) dedication to fairness in making the rules for their school and arbitrating on school disputes. See A.S. Neill, *Summerhill School: A New View of Childhood*, Ed. Albert Lamb (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1992).

⁶ For more on character education, visit <http://www.goodcharacter.com>.

Youth Self-Empowerment and Anti-Violence

The partners in SlammED believe that having knowledge, practice, and confidence in the written and spoken language is essential to self-empowering youth, and the arts—literary, performing, and visual—are an ideal vehicle for self-expression. SlammED fosters the development and growth of the student, beginning where he or she is and positing slam as one possible avenue toward productive and creative expression and empowerment.

Many educators have also used slam poetry to directly address *violence*—perpetrated and experienced by youth. Educators Heather E. Bruce and Brian Dexter Davis explain that slam is a medium teachers can use to “maximize [students’] ability to express the complexity of their thoughts in words and to practice expressing those thoughts verbally, especially when it comes to emotions, rather than acting on angry, violent impulse.”⁷ The potential of this approach—expression through words not fists, poetry as a violence-prevention and intervention strategy—is represented dramatically in the highly recommended film, *Slam*.⁸

Proactive, effective anti-violence strategies require nurturing empathy, self-respect, conscience...the moral intelligence virtues explicated above.

Advancing the Arts in Schools and Communities

SlammED breaks down distinctions between art forms and disciplines, preferring interdisciplinary approaches focusing on media as means of expression. Contrived distinctions between poems and raps songs, hip hop dancers and artists, visual art and performance are blurred. The art of SlammED is the creativity and expression of the students. The activities also illustrate that art can be a fun, energetic, physical, social, and relevant force in our communities, demystifying it while encouraging students to get involved and make their own art—and make art their own!

INTRODUCTION TO LESSON PLANS AND ACTIVITIES

Each of the following activities—single and ongoing lesson plans—can be adapted to suit your needs, resources, and the amount of time you can devote to this program. Included are activity outlines, resources and materials, rationales, selected examples from the Mendel Art Gallery’s SlammED program, and suggested adaptations and extensions.

⁷ “Slam: Hip-hop Meets Poetry—A Strategy for Violence Intervention,” *English Journal*, May 2000, 89:5, 119-127.

⁸ *Slam*. Dir. Marc Levin, Trimark Pictures/Offline Entertainment Group, 1998.

ACTIVITY: Introduction to Slam

There are several ways to introduce your students to slam poetry.

Guest Speaker/Workshop

Invite a slam or spoken word poet in your community to speak to your class about the history of slam poetry and introduce students to the genre. This may involve a demonstration of slam poets in action (audio and/or audio/visual, live or recorded) and a performance. For example, for the Mendel's SlammED project, we invited Saskatoon-based poet Holly Luning⁹ to introduce students to slam poetry. The following is Luning's outline of her introductory workshop, which may serve as a guide to your slam or spoken word poetry.

Slam Background and Aural Introduction

Teach a lesson on the general history and development of slam poetry in North America, and listen to recordings of performances by Canadian slam poets. Students are directed to observe the content and subject matter of the poems, as well as the performance and delivery style of the poet.

Suggested Listening: Slam and Spoken Word Poets

- Lilian Allen <<http://www.dubpoetscollective.com/collective.html>>
- Afua Cooper <<http://www.dubpoetscollective.com/afuacooper.html>>
- Brenden McLeod <brendanmcleodca.nationprotect.net/index.htm>
- Magpie Ulysses <<http://www.myspace.com/madameulysses>>
- Shane Koyczan <<http://www.koyczan.com/>>
- Patrick Swan <<http://www.myspace.com/patrickswan>>
- Selections from *Carnivocal: A Celebration of Sound Poetry*¹⁰ (audio CD), including: bpNichol, Christian Bok Sea Horses, and Flying Fish
- Selections from *The CBC Poetry Face-Off*¹¹ (audio CDs), including:
 - David McGimpsey, Michelle Muir a.k.a. 'Nuff Said, and Holly Luning (2006)
 - Q the Romantic Revolutionary a.k.a. Queeverne Kirk, Tanya Davis, Christian Bok, Al St. Louis (2005)

Direct-Instruction

Teach a lesson on slam poetry. Introduce students to the history of the poetry slam, including influences, origins, major slam poets, examples of slam poetry, and connections to rap and hip-hop.

⁹ See Activity: Slam, Music, and Performance (below) for Luning's bio.

¹⁰ *Carnivocal: A Celebration of Sound Poetry* (audio CD), Ed. Douglas Barbour and Stephen Scobie, Red Deer Press, 2002.

¹¹ *The CBC Poetry Face-Off* available on audio CD from CBC Audio <<http://www.cbcsshop.ca/CBC/>>.

Student Research

Make slam a collaborative, cooperative research project. Divide your class into collaborative research groups, and assign each group a theme or research objective (e.g. history of slam poetry, examples of slam poetry, how to host a slam, slam today, slam influences, rap and hip-hop poetry, etc.).

There are some excellent books on slam poetry, but they are very specific and may not be available in your library; we suggest using web quest¹² or web-based research, since there are numerous comprehensive internet sites and sources available (see Appendix I of this resource). We also encourage accessing community experts in the research project (e.g. groups interview local slam poets, report on a slam competition, etc.). Upon completion, have each group teach their findings to the class (suggestions: group presentation, audio/visual presentation, jigsaw, carousel).

Resources

We have provided a comprehensive compendium of sources and resources on slam history, performance, and examples at the end of this resource (see Appendix I).

¹² For information on webquests and designing effective, inquiry-based webquests, visit <http://webquest.org>. You may also want to include mini-lessons on guidelines for using and how to cite internet-based sources.

ACTIVITY: Create your own Slam Journal

Materials and Supplies:

- generic notebooks (lined-paper), one per student
- art supplies (e.g. markers, crayons, paint and brushes, glue, scissors, etc.)

Creating slam journals is a fabulous way to start the poetry writing process. Distribute the notebooks. Explain to students that these are *their* slam journals and that today's activity is to begin to make them their own. The objective: each student will transform a generic notebook into a work of art—a personalized, creative canvas for their thoughts, feelings, notes, ideas, and poems.

As students use these journals throughout the project, encourage them to consider their journal as a work of art always-in-progress.

Suggestions for Slam Journal Creation**Graffiti**

If slam is the "democratization of verse," graffiti may be the democratization of space. Connecting this prolific and relevant art form and mode of social and political expression to slam deepens students understanding of the genre and their right to be heard. Encourage your students to use graffiti to express themselves on the cover of their slam journals.

Invite a local graffiti artist to conduct a workshop or devise your own lesson plans. There are numerous resources available on the rich and complex history of graffiti that explore the political and social context of graffiti art, and lesson plans on doing graffiti.

For example, see educator Jennie Auble's lesson (including rubrics and student self-assessments), "Graffiti Name Tag - Elements and Principles of Art" on the Incredible Art Department's website at <http://www.princetonol.com/groups/iad/lessons/middle/Jen-tag.htm> - The.

Book-making

As an alternative to the generic notebook, turn the journal itself into an art project and media history lesson by helping students construct their own slam journals. Organize a book-making workshop with a local artist or conduct your own.

The San Diego Museum of Art developed excellent resources and lesson plans on book-making for the exhibition *Young Art 2002: The Art of the Book*, which are available for download at <http://www.sdmart.org/education-plans.html> - book.

ACTIVITY: Listening To and Viewing Slam

As an ongoing SlammED activity (following up from the [Introduction to Slam Poetry](#) lesson, above), students listen to and watch recordings of a diverse range of slam and/or spoken word poetry—or, better yet, attend slam or spoken word events. The more exposure students have to slam performances, the more likely they are to take chances in both their poetry writing and their performances.

During each viewing/listening session, encourage students to take notes—in their new slam journals—on poets' poems and performances. This may include recording favourite lines, interesting words or phrases, effective metaphors, emotional responses, critiques, performance techniques, etc. This gives students material to refer to when you move into poetry writing, slam performances, and peer workshopping.

In addition to the resources below, there are many spoken word and slam recordings available online. YouTube.com, MySpace.com, and other audio- and video-sharing websites are excellent sources of new and interesting recordings. There are also many slam-related and spoken word examples on film, television, and online that may also benefit your students. For a comprehensive and diverse list of slam audio and video, please see [Appendix I](#).

SlammED strives to demystify poetry, breaking down psychological barriers to writing and expression. Students revision poetry as accessible, fun, and hip—and as a vehicle to express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Listening and viewing slam and spoken word throughout your SlammED project allows students to continue to gather ideas on poetry and performances as they are creating their own slams.

Exposure to a variety of spoken word and performances, particularly those that connect to students' popular culture and speak to their experience, is particularly helpful for those students who say "I can't do poetry" or, the old favourite, "this sucks"! For example, while some students related to Saul Williams' passionate and enigmatic slams, others responded to three short clips of Mike Meyers doing his rendition of beat poetry in *So I Married an Axe Murderer*.¹³

Experiment—and have fun!

¹³ Dir. Thomas Schlamme, Sony Pictures, 1993.

ACTIVITY: Playing with Words

SlammED demystifies "big-P Poetry" and strives to make it accessible to students and to seize the genre as their own. Before getting into the building blocks of poetry, give students the opportunity to literally play with language. In these activities, students physically manipulate language, encouraging them to play with words (literally and figuratively).

Introduction: Descriptive Sentence

As a class, compose a long sentence that contains numerous adjectives. For example:

On a dark and stormy summer night, three campers found themselves terribly lost in the deep, dark woods, trying to be brave and cocky despite being terrified and frightened by every ominous creak and lightning-lit glimpse of monstrous tree limbs and creepy creatures.

The wild shrieking wind roared across the desolate golden prairie, blowing through small cracks in decrepit old buildings, twisting young green poplars, churning up fine, powdery dirt, and devouring the sweet, soft baby's breath and golden dandelions in its path.¹⁴

Invite students to collaborate by shouting out words and phrases to complete the sentence.

Divide students into working groups. Instruct each group to write out the sentence in large (and legible) format on pieces of chart paper and cut out each word. Their task now is to rearrange the words to create a new sentence. Reinforce the collaborative nature of the exercise by encouraging groups to discuss and deliberate on their choices within their group. Once every group has completed the task, invite a spokesperson to explain their process and outcome.

Playing with Poetry

Now repeat the activity using a slam poem (e.g. from those you watched or listened to in the introduction or from the SlammED poem examples in Appendix II). For this, you may want to provide each group with the same poem or give each a different poem. Have photocopies of the poem(s) for students to cut out and rearrange. If you really want to push it, give each group an envelope containing their poem already cut into words and phrases, and only reveal the original poem after students have used it to construct their own.

¹⁴ Obviously, you might point out that overuse of adjectives does not a good sentence make!

ACTIVITY: Building Poetic Tools

Once students have been exposed to slam poetry examples, students explore poetry and figurative language and how successful slam poets use certain tools and techniques (e.g. the use of metaphor, imagery, narrative, and rhythm) to construct an effective text. Lead a discussion about selecting and developing subject matter, point of view, and poetic voice. Throughout, students are encouraged to start thinking about topics for their own slam poems.¹⁵

Most English and Language Arts teachers have tried-and-true lessons for teaching poetry that can be adapted for this activity. For SlammED, poet Holly Luning's explains that the point "wasn't to educate the students on technical terms, but rather to illustrate some effective ways to use language." The focus is on poetic *tools*—ideas, concepts, and ways of playing with language and its possibilities that students can use to expand their poetic voices and express themselves through poetry.

Suggestions

Approach poetic devices as tools to be used, not names and definitions to be memorised. Use examples from the slam poems to illustrate how slam poets use these tools to create memorable images, exude a general mood, feeling, or atmosphere, express their emotions, and communicate with and inspire emotional responses in their audience.¹⁶

You may also choose to begin with a student poem, such as Malina's "Coffin" (below).¹⁷ For example, introduce (or reintroduce) metaphor through her use of a coffin to explicate her sense of confinement and doom, her use of repetition, how she uses language to express her emotions and conjure images, and students' emotional and critical responses to her poem.

Coffin

Malina, Grade 8, St. John

I don't want to do this anymore
because this life is so cold...
 I can't even get warm
 or breathe air
 in this world.

This world is so cold
I can't do this no more.
This thing in my heart is saying: do not go there
 saying: you're dead.

¹⁵ Adapted from Holly Luning's second slam workshop for the Mendel's SlammED (2007).

¹⁶ PBS's News Hour Extra poetry site includes an excellent resource on poetic tools entitled "Rules, Tools, and Form," available at <<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/jan-june00/poetryboxrules.html>>.

¹⁷ For more student poetry from the Mendel Art Gallery's SlammED, see [Appendix II](#).

I hate it so much that I do not like being alive.
I hate this place,
 I don't know how I got here
 I just know that I am here so
 why can't I get out of here?
I wonder all the time how I got here
 why I'm here
 and why can't I get out of this place?
I look for a way
 to get out of this place
 but I can't bear the air of this place
I can't move because I'm already dead
 in this place.
My soul is stuck in this coffin,
 that's why I can't move
 or get out
 and
 it's
 all
 your
 fault!

Building poetic tools is an ongoing process. Throughout the activities in SlammED, continue to introduce poetic devices and take advantage of opportunities to demonstrate how poets use them (particularly how the students themselves are using them, even if they have not attached the proper "term" to what they are doing).

Encourage students to take risks, try out techniques, and recognise their capacity to use these tools to make their poems more effective.

ACTIVITY (Ongoing): Poetry Writing

Your students are now familiar with slam and other spoken word poetry, written and in performance, and have the basic poetic tools on which to build. The following are different approaches aimed at filling up those gorgeous slam journals with amazing poetry.

Daily Warm-Up Exercise: Timed-Writing

This two-minute daily exercise allows students to stop *thinking* so hard about writing poetry and start writing—whatever comes out of their heads, through their hands, and onto the page.¹⁸ It is a brilliant warm-up, to get those creative juices flowing and getting students used to writing.

Instruct students to take out their slam journals and turn to a blank page. Explain that once you give the word, they are to write, without lifting pen or pencil from paper, until you say stop. To be effective, this exercise should be no longer than two minutes. Be dramatic: use a stop-watch, a whistle, even wear a referee jersey! This writing does not need to be neat or make sense—even to the writer. Encourage students to let their thoughts leak all over the page!

Before you say “go,” give students a prompt. Suggestions:

- two or three random words, shouted out by students
- a headline from the daily newspaper
- music (anything from Tupac to Tom Waits)
- recent events (“on the way to school...”, “in my dream last night...”, “last weekend...”)

Your prompt may also be about how they are to write on the page. For example, every 15 seconds, shout out “turn,” and students must turn their journal 90° clockwise, or they must write in a circle, etc.

Following the timed writing, give students a couple of minutes to read over what they have written. Then, invite them to volunteer to share something (e.g. a selection they like, an unexpected word or phrase, etc.) with the class. Students will become more comfortable with sharing their writing and appreciate what others share. They may even start making suggestions about prompts and variations. Continue to reinforce the potential for timed writing as inspiration or raw material for a slam poem.

Experimenting with Form

While slam is often about breaking the rules, at this point, they may need to know what the “rules” are—i.e. to understand different forms and conventions of poetry. You will find that while some students will only write in free verse, others may find their groove writing Elizabethan sonnets or epic poems or haiku.

¹⁸ Special thanks to Jill Morris, English teacher extraordinaire at Ursula Franklin Academy in Toronto, for demonstrating the effectiveness of this activity.

This is where your tried-and-true poetry writing lessons are going to come into play.¹⁹ Introduce your students to different poetic forms and genres, take them through examples of each, and give them a chance to experiment with them in their slam journals.

Freewriting

Using the timed-writing exercise as a point of departure, you are familiarizing your students with writing from a prompt. Continue this practice in more intensive freewriting sessions. Students may choose to write in a particular genre or form or in free verse or stream-of-consciousness.

Continuously expand your prompt repertoire and employ evocative prompts that get at the emotions and feelings of the students. Heather E. Bruce and Bryan Dexter Davis have had much success with the following prompts in their slam poetry classes:

- "It makes me feel like screaming when..."
- "I just don't get it when..."
- "I get so angry when..."
- "I made me laugh when..."
- write about a particular feeling or emotion (e.g. pain).²⁰

You may also want to use freewriting sessions to explore a current dynamic, trend, or conflict within your school or the community. For example, if bullying is a current concern in your school, use it as a thematic prompt. If there has been a recent tragedy in your community, invite students to respond to it through poetry.

If everyone is given the time and opportunity to collect their thoughts and compose a poem about the same thing, perhaps you can use this to better understand the students, and for them to understand each other (building community, empathy, conscience, etc.) and the issues they face, as individuals and as a community.

If your students demonstrate interest in rap and hip-hop, which infuse much slam poetry and performances, use it as a poetry lesson. For inspiration, see Flocabulary's excellent lesson plan by Emcee Escher, esq., "The Official Flocabulary 10-Pronged Technique for Learning to Freestyle Rap."²¹ This lesson also works effectively in conjunction with the Connecting Slam to Music and Performance activity (see below).

¹⁹ For a comprehensive and easy-to-adapt series of lessons on writing different genres and forms of poetry (and examples), see educator M.S. Rogers' "Thirty Days of Poetry" on her website, available at http://www.msrogers.com/English2/poetry/30_days_of_poetry.htm.

²⁰ "Slam: Hip-hop Meets Poetry—A Strategy for Violence Intervention," *English Journal*, May 2000, 89:5, 124.

²¹ Available at <http://www.flocabulary.com/freestylerep>.

Poetry Sharing

Always ensure students are given time and opportunity to share their poems with you and their peers (see [Peer Poetry Workshopping](#), below). Students need to become accustomed to reading their poems aloud before they can perform them. Invite students to share their poems at the end of each poetry writing session, and ensure that *each and every student* reads over the course of your sessions.

Invite students to submit their journals to you regularly (for formative assessment, progress reports, and evaluation). Students may be reluctant to share their poems and freewriting with you; in this case, give them a way to mark the poems they do (or do not) want you to read and assure them that you will not read the off-limits poems, but will only check to see that they are, indeed, doing the assigned writing.

The success of the SlammED program relies upon full student participation. While some students will be more comfortable in certain roles and activities (e.g. writing, performing, dancing, planning, visual art making, etc.), everyone needs to attempt everything. This continues the process of nurturing the moral intelligence virtues and building community in the classroom.

ACTIVITY: Student Voices, Student Vernacular

In slam, "ain't" *is* a word!

In traditional English and Language Arts classrooms, students are taught "standard" (or "proper") English and, all too often, are actively discouraged from speaking and writing in their vernacular and dialect. Slam, by its very nature, *encourages* students to embrace their everyday speech²² and use it to express themselves in poetic form. The following activity is designed to work in conjunction with your regular poetry writing sessions (above).

Talkin' about Talk

Begin by leading a discussion about slang, dialect, and vernacular (and define the terms).²³ Return to some of the slam examples you used in the introduction. Draw students' attention to examples of "informal" language, non-standard English, and slang. Ask students to give examples from their everyday speech and popular culture, and to offer anecdotes about "school English" and "outside-school English," and provide examples from slam and other poetry that break down such distinctions. Lead a discussion about how the poet uses these words or phrases and why they may be more effective than "standard English."

Prompts:

- What does this word/phrase mean to you?
- Where have you heard it before?
- What assumptions does it lead you to?
- How does this word/phrase express emotion (e.g. anger, fear, happiness, frustration)?
- Slang is often very *evocative* (prompting vivid images, memories, or feelings). How is the poet's use of slang evocative?
- How might writing in everyday speech help us express ourselves? How do you think it helps this poet?²⁴
- How might using your vernacular in your poetry be empowering? validating? emancipatory?

²² Depending on your school and classroom environment, you may need to draw parameters around this, setting limits (e.g. derogatory speech, racist terms, discriminatory labels, profanity), at your discretion.

²³ In this discussion, students may bring up derogatory or discriminatory words and labels. Resist the urge to say "you can't say that"; rather, use this "teachable moment" to talk about why certain words and phrases hurt individuals and groups. For example, in one SlammED mentoring session, a student used "that's gay," which prompted a meaningful discussion about who this hurts and why, the background and etymology of gay, and comparisons to other such discriminatory words and slurs. While the student had often been told that she should not say "that's gay," no one had ever engaged her in a discussion about why she should not. By her own volition, she revised her poem.

²⁴ See also linguist John R. Rickford excellent article, "Using the Vernacular to Teach the Standard, <<http://www.stanford.edu/~rickford/papers/vernacular toteachstandard.html>>.

Think-Pair-Share

Individually, each student is to come up with a list of ten words or phrases that they use in their everyday speech that they may not use (or be allowed to use) in school. This may include slang, patois, different dialects, Ebonics, the language they use online and in text messaging—encourage them to think about how they use language!

In pairs, students compare their lists, note similarities and differences, and, if necessary, explain what the words or phrases mean and where they come from. Returning to full-class discussion, invite each pair to share what they discussed.

Writing in Vernacular

For the remainder of the period, give students the opportunity to write a poem using what they have learned. Suggest that they start their poem with one of the words or phrases they wrote down for the think-pair-share. Encourage them to play with the form, infusing their writing with the words and phrases they use every day (and may never have been allowed to use in the classroom!).

Talking about Talk II: Violence

Ask students to consider their everyday speech, slang, vernacular, and dialect in terms of *violence*—both in terms of violence done with words and the violence involved in not allowing certain words or phrases to be uttered.²⁵ Lead a discussion about how poets address discursive violence, directly and indirectly, in their poems. As a prompt, you might begin this discussion with the adage: "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me."

Additional Suggestions

You know your students, their culture, the music they listen to, the television programs and movies they watch, their online and mobile phone use, the current trends in slang, etc. Use this knowledge to push the concepts introduced and discussed in this lesson.²⁶

²⁵ For example, in Canada's Residential Schools, Aboriginal students were forbidden to speak their language and forced to use standard English. This can be a point of departure for a meaningful discussion of what language means to its speakers, and why the Canadian government and churches running the schools considered Aboriginal languages such a threat (in terms of colonization, assimilation, and cultural genocide). For an excellent example of how poets seize their vernacular and dialect, see Maria Campbell's "Jacob" in *An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English*, 2nd edition, Ed. Daniel David Moses and Terry Goldie (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 1998), 128-136.

²⁶ For examples and inspiration, check out the website *Flowcabulary: Hip-Hop in the Classroom* <<http://www.flowcabulary.com>>.

ACTIVITY: Connecting Visual Art and Poetry

During the Mendel Art Gallery's SlammED, each participating class enjoyed a tour of the Gallery's current exhibitions and in-classroom activities responding to the visual art they viewed. We strongly encourage you to include a gallery or museum visit in your SlammED program. Contact your local galleries and museums to enquire about current exhibitions and facilitated tours. Gallery educators are often amenable to creating a gallery experience that meets your specific needs.

Ekphrastic Poetry

Ekphrastic poetry²⁷ is poetry inspired by or responding to visual art. This activity reinforces the interdisciplinary nature of art and expression, demonstrating how works of art and various art forms are inspired by and inspire the creation of art. Students learn ways to engage in a "conversation" or dialogue with art through their own art creation and writing.

Before your gallery visit, introduce students to ekphrastic poems and the visual art that inspired the poets. Suggestions:

- Homer's description of the Shield of Achilles in *The Iliad* and an image of the shield
- Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and a Grecian urn
- W.H. Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" and Pieter Breughel the Elder's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*
- a poem and painting from Don Kerr's *My Own Places: Poems on John Constable*²⁸
- select examples from the more than 40 poems and the art that inspired them on the Ekphrastic Excursions site <http://www.people.virginia.edu/~djr4r/anth_poems.html>

Ensure that students bring their slam journals to your gallery visit. Before the tour, ask students to take notes on paintings, sculpture, or installations that evoke a strong response. Ensure students have the opportunity to return to these particular works to make sketches and notes.

Back in the classroom, each student will write a poem in response to one work, using their notes and sketches. In their peer-workshopping groups, students can share their poems and invite peers to guess which work inspired it. Students compare and contrast the ekphrastic poetry they created, the different approaches they took, etc. Ask students to explain their process and inspiration, and discuss as a group.

²⁷ For more information on ekphrastic poetry and lesson planning, see Lynn Marsico's "Ekphrastic Poetry: Exploring the Visual Arts with a Poet's Eye," <http://www.chatham.edu/pti/2005 Units/Play It Again_Sam/Marsico UNIT.pdf>.

²⁸ Published by University of Calgary Press.

ACTIVITY (Ongoing): Peer Poetry Workshopping

SlammED embraces writing as a process. Every year, OISE-UT English instructor Joan O’Callaghan tells future English teachers, “if you want to teach writing, you must make room for the process—you cannot expect students’ best writing in one shot, in one class.”

Workshopping makes room for the writing process to occur, allowing students to understand the process of writing—pre-writing, writing, revising and rewriting, editing and proofreading, and sharing.²⁹ Words do not spring forth magically from a poet’s brain to page as a tight, finished poem but, rather, poems are often written and rewritten, tweaked and tightened. While poetry is personal and individual, many poets collaborate with other poets and editors in the process from conception to publication or performance. Workshopping also builds community in the classroom. Students come to recognise the value of their peers’ suggestions and advice, and understand that their contributions and knowledge are valuable. Each student becomes a writer, editor, proofreader, collaborator, and critic. It also deemphasises the mark or grade, emphasising writing as a process, not a mere product.

Successful workshopping groups require modelling, observation, and mediation. To work effectively, students must respect each other and offer constructive criticism while learning from each other. Workshopping is an opportunity for students to hone their critical skills and develop their social skills and moral intelligences.

Suggestions for Successful Peer Workshopping:

- The process *must* be modelled effectively. In SlammED, the workshop leader demonstrated how to provide constructive criticism and meaningful feedback in response to a volunteer student’s poem, offering examples of what to look for and respond to, and how to frame responses positively.
- Establish guidelines for editors that set parameters around the critique. For instance, all editing notes need to be qualified (e.g. “this rocks because...” or “this is not working for me because...”). Suggest that editors never use “should” statements (i.e. not: “you *should* do this”; but: “you *could* try this”). Inviting the students to create guidelines contributes to building trust in the process while fostering community in the classroom.
- Provide each peer group member with a copy of each member’s poem. Ensure there is plenty of white space on each copy, in which peer editors can write their comments and make suggestions.
- Consider inviting members of a more advanced writing class (e.g. Grade 12s working with Grade 9s, etc.) or a community poetry group to model the process and work in each peer group—affording each group intensive mentoring and modelling.
- Make time for the process to happen and for students to engage in the process.

²⁹ Note: these processes are not chronological, nor is it assumed that each stage occurs only once.

ACTIVITY: Connecting Slam to Music and Performance

For SlammED, Mendel Art Gallery programmers sought out artists in our community to work with the students on their slams. The underlying objective of this activity is to infuse slam with art, expose students to the expertise and art forms of local artists, and encourage a multidisciplinary approach to slam.

The following introduces the artists we worked with for SlammED and their approaches to the program, while offering suggestions for involving artists in your community.

Poet: Holly Luhning

Saskatoon-based poet Holly Luhning is a PhD candidate in the Department of English at the University of Saskatchewan. She holds a BA in English from the University of Victoria, and an MA in English and Creative Writing from the University of New Brunswick. Holly's creative writing has appeared in literary journals in Canada and abroad, and she is the author of *Sway*, a collection of poetry (ThistleDown Press 2003), which was nominated for a 2004 Saskatchewan Book award, and a chapbook, *Plush* (JackPine, 2006). Luhning took 2nd place at the Annual CBC Poetry Face-Off in 2006.

In a wrap-up evaluation, one student writes that Luhning "helped us a lot on improving our poems by getting us to listen to professional poets" and another said she "was cool and did a very good job helping us learn about poetry." One teacher explained that Luhning "set a respectful tone for student poetry."

Hip-Hop Artist: Eekwol

Eekwol is a member of Muskoday First Nation. Along with her crew Innersoulflow, and part ownership of an up and coming production company, Eekwol has taken her eight years of dedication to the art of hip-hop to give something back to the community. Her first solo release, *Soundsick*, includes a range of styles along with a guest appearance by PSC.Luckyiam. This work is one of many productions crafted by Mils, a dedicated producer who has worked with many artists including Luckyiam.Psc and Eligh of the Living Legends and Pigeon John of L.A. Symphony. Eekwol's lyrical ability shines throughout the *Innersoulflow* EP, *Frequent Flyers* self-titled full length, *Mils and Lucas* EP, *Factor Time Invested Compilation*, *The Redwire Magazine Compilation*, *Luckyiam.PSC Extra Credit 2* album, and *Innersoulflow* full length, *The Best Kept Secret*. Eekwol's full-length debut, *Apprentice to the Mystery*, was launched in 2004. Since then she has been performing across Canada, including a concert at the Mendel's Living Artfully Festival in 2006.

In her SlammED workshop, Eekwol explored words, rhyme and rhythm, as well as the history of hip-hop as an emancipatory art form. She performed tracks from her album *Apprentice to the Mystery* and screened a video of a Toronto performance. She instructed students on making beats and feeling a rhythm, and using it in their poems and performances. She also talked to students about the challenges of working in the music industry and encouraged them to follow their passions, whatever they may be.

Eekwol impacted some students greatly and showed her support for students at the final slam-off. For one student, the best thing about SlammED: "Eekwol came to see us doing our poems." In their evaluations, students write that Eekwol was "awesome!!!" and "a real inspiration." Teachers commented that "the students loved her" and some could not stop talking about her.

Hip-Hop and Breakdancing: def SOL

Invite a hip-hop artist, breakdancer, street-dance, or multi-genre dance instructor (or troupe) to your school to conduct a workshop. We encourage you to collaborate with your colleagues in physical education/kinesiology, drama and theatre, and health and wellness. For SlammED, we called upon the expertise of Saskatoon's def SOL Productions.

def SOL is a hip hop dance company whose artists/performers and instructors combine studio ethics with a fresh street-style environment. def SOL continues to be the first and only company in Saskatoon focusing on the instruction and mastery of hip hop & street dance techniques. Through their school workshops, def SOL provides students with the opportunity to experience dance forms not often available in school Physical Education, Drama, and extra-curricular activities or in the traditional studio setting. def SOL aims to promote awareness of the hip-hop culture and its roots as an outlet for positive self expression. Choreography by def SOL's Artistic Director, Amanda Murray (aka BGirl M-Rae), is appealing to all ages. Using street and studio training, Murray has choreographed several medal-winning dances for competitions such as Dance Power, Quill Plains and the Pulse. Since the 2004/05 season, def SOL's annual hip hop show, Street Stylez,' has brought hip-hop dance and culture to a larger audience by combining original and entertaining student performances with guest appearances by local DJs, MCs, and graffiti artists.

In the SlammED workshops with def SOL, students were introduced to street techniques that fuse raw, energetic street dance forms—hip-hop, crumping, and breakdancing—with cool video styles. Students learned to move their bodies to a variety of beats and rhythms, in preparation for using their bodies physically in their slam performances.

Suggestions:

Connect with the artists in your community. Peruse your local newspapers and websites, talk to your students (founts of information on popular culture) and colleagues, and explore available options. If you are having difficulty, contact local galleries, theatres, publishing houses, and dance studios, colleges and universities, and artist collectives.

ACTIVITY: Taking it to the Stage

Taking slam from written poetry to performance is an ongoing process, building on students experiences viewing and listening to slam, their exposure to different art forms and performance techniques, and experiments with dance and music,

Slam Performances

In her third SlammED workshop, Holly Luning focused on creating a slam performance and effectively translating written poems into live oral/aural experiences. She led students through voice and projection exercises and worked on vocal techniques. She reintroduced some of the slam examples from her first workshop ([Introduction to Slam](#), above), pausing to identify and discuss techniques poets use to transform their poems into performances.

Luning encouraged students to think about how their poems will manifest themselves as oral, rather than written, texts/performances. Students were also given opportunities to get up and try out their work in front of the class, while the teacher, liaisons, and Luning offered constructive feedback (excellent modelling for peer workshops).

Experimenting with Voice

Re-emphasize the importance of voice, gestures, and the body to effective slam performances. Each student selects three words (at random or from their own poems). Individually, they prepare and practice at least three different ways of delivering their three words (e.g. variations in pacing, emphasis, and volume, body language, sound effects, facial expressions, etc.). In working groups, students take turns performing their words, learning from each other in the process (e.g. experimenting with new techniques, working with suggestions and feedback, trying duets or team performances, etc.). This also helps to break the "performance ice," as a transition from writing to performance.

Peer Workshopping

As a result of poetry and peer workshopping sessions, students have a repertoire of poems. Ask each students to select two or three poems to take to the next level: slam performance. You may need to help them with their selection or ask the workshopping group to make suggestions. Now that students are familiar with a host of performance techniques and examples, repeat the [peer workshopping process](#) (see above), focusing on how to perform their selected poems, experimenting with and honing their slam techniques.

Once students have workshopped (and, ideally, memorized) their poems, stage a slam rehearsal in which students test-run their slams, receive more peer feedback, and finely tune their poems and performances before the slam-off.

ACTIVITY: Collaborative Community Development of Slam Criteria

"The points are not the point; the point is poetry."

—Allan Wolf, Slammaster

Collaboration, community development, constructive conflict resolution, courage and trust, and other forms of moral intelligence are all underlying themes of the SlammED. Slam, according to poetry activist and former slam-master of the NuYorican Poets Café Bob Holman, is "the democratization of verse." In SlammED, that democratization applies not only to verse, but to the entire slam process. While contemporary classrooms are not necessarily democracies, SlammED encourages teachers to incorporate democratic processes into this project.

Thus, the development of the slam judging criteria and rules for the audience are student, not teacher, directed. The teacher may shape the outline and nudge students towards certain criteria (e.g. memorization), but student involvement is integral. Students need to entrust each other with their voices, feelings, and bodies. Community development of the criteria upon which their slams will be judged and how the audience will participate are crucial elements in the cultivation of that trust.

As a community, engage all SlammED students in developing:

- 1) SlammED criteria, outlining how each performer will be judged and
- 2) audience guidelines.

Slam Judging Criteria

Invite students to collaborate in developing the criteria upon which their slam performances will be judged. You can shape this activity so the outcome is in the form of a straight point system or a rubric.

For the Mendel's SlammED, the criteria took the form of a straight point system: for each criterion, a student could be awarded a zero, a half-point, or one point. While a rubric may better demonstrate performers' degrees of achievement, the point system better facilitated both speed of judging and use of student judges.

As a class or in small groups, students make lists of criteria upon which they think performances should be judged. Teachers may direct students to consider certain elements of a slam (e.g. the poem's composition and use of poetic devices, body language, enunciation, etc.), but the final selection is up to the students. For SlammED, students brought forth a list of all of the possible things upon which they could be judged, and worked collaboratively and democratically (a show of hands) to establish ten final criteria. Students and groups are encouraged to "make their case" and to discuss the pros and cons of each suggestion.

Because the Mendel's SlammED involved three different classes in three different schools,³⁰ each class brought forth their criteria and the Mendel liaison acted as a negotiator between the schools. Through this process, the three classes agreed upon the following:

Judging Criteria

1 point each = 10 points

1. facial expressions
2. expression - voice/speech
3. memorization
4. volume (loud enough so everyone can hear)
5. eye contact
6. audience is able to follow/understand the poem
7. movement
8. flow (no "umms" and "uhs")
9. enunciation ("the tip of the tongue, the teeth, and the lips")
10. audience response

Each judge will give the poet a mark out of ten (see Appendix III – Judging Tally Sheet). Judges may use half-marks (e.g. 0.5). No judge is to give a score under 5.0 (i.e. no one fails). In the tallying of the scores, for each poet, the lowest and highest score are dropped and the three remaining scores are added together for a score out of 30.

Adaptations and Suggestions

- Develop benchmarks rather than specific criteria and allow judges to award points at their discretion.³¹
- Use the student-developed criteria as the basis for a rubric.
- Some poems are very short but judging must be very quick—otherwise the audience will grow impatient and will lose their focus. Use Olympic judging as an example of speedy and efficient judging. The slam host is also encouraged to keep the audience entertained during the judging process.

Slam-Off Awards

For the Mendel's SlammED Slam-Off, we awarded five prizes. We awarded a total points-based first prize (Best Slam Award) and second prize (Slam Spirit Award). We also gave the judges options for other awards, from which they could choose three additional prizes to award.³² This allowed the judging panel the opportunity to respond to the slam

³⁰ The 2007 Grade 5/6 class at Pleasant Hill Community School, the Grade 6/7 class at North Park Wilson School, and St. John Community School's Grade 8s.

³¹ For an example of such benchmarks, developed by educator Brenda Dyck and her Grade 6 & 7 students, see "A Poetry Slam Cures the Midwinter Blahs" on *Education World*, available at http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/voice/voice069.shtml.

³² Awards given out by the judges at the 2007 SlammED Slam-Off are marked with an asterix.

performances and the freedom to choose poems and performances that demonstrated moral intelligence, virtues, character, and the spirit of slam. The following is a list of those optional awards and the corresponding criteria:

Most Courageous Voice*

- poet really, really put her/his soul in the poem
- took a chance and exposed his/her inner self
- translated strong emotions (anger, pain, happiness, loss, frustration, etc.) into words and articulated deep feelings, fears, emotions, etc.
- poet's words were very brave and courageous

Gutsiest Performance

- poet really, really put her/himself out there in his/her performance
- dug deep and performed his/her words
- took chances with her/his body on stage
- movement, expression, body language, used voice
- passionate performance

Best Audience Response

- the audience (including the judges) responded to the poet's words and performance
- e.g. if it was a sad poem, the audience was silent, looked like they were going to cry (or cried), if it was a funny poem, the audience was laughing (even rolling in the aisles)

Most Energetic Performance*

- you could see that the poet was having fun with the performance
- you could feel the energy

Most Memorable Images

- poet created images with words that we could see and imagine in our minds (a picture made of words)
- made the ordinary extraordinary

Best Recovery*

- poet faltered or could not stop giggling or shaking or could not remember her/his poem, but was able to take a deep breath, start over, and recover their poem/performance

Surprise to the Senses

- poet used words or phrases that appealed to our senses (sight, touch, taste, hearing, smell)
- poem awakened or surprised the senses
- best use of figurative language and poetic tools and devices

Judges' Choice

Slam Audience Guidelines

Students engaged in a similar process to create guidelines for the members of the audience. These guidelines are designed *by the students*, in collaboration, to make them feel comfortable performing their poems.³³

For example, the following are the audience guidelines devised by students involved in SlammED. These rules derive from the students' understanding of the moral intelligence virtues (see introduction): empathy, conscience, self-control, respect, kindness, tolerance, and fairness.

SlammED Audience Guidelines

Each poet deserves your respect (and will respect you).
Each poet also deserves a big round of applause!

DO

Clap
Listen
Laugh *with*
Whistle
Give supportive looks to
Be respectful
Use attentive posture (sit up, look at)
Pay attention

DO NOT

Boo
Talk
Laugh *at*
Yell "bad stuff" (jeer, heckle)
Fiddle around
Listen to/play with your ipod

³³ As such, criteria may differ from the criteria on which you are assessing or evaluating students for marking purposes.

ACTIVITY: Slam-Off Planning

Engage your students in planning the slam-off. The following are a list of possible avenues for student involvement.

There are many ways to approach the duties and responsibilities involved in planning the slam-off. You may use a teacher-directed or student-directed approach, assigning duties or having students volunteer, working in committees or top-down from an elected or appointed planning board or committee. We encourage you to act as a member of the community, putting as much control and responsibility in the hands of your students as possible.

Start with a few very important decisions:

- who and how many people will you invite (e.g. classroom, parents/guardians, other classes, whole school, public, etc.)?
- where would you like to hold the slam-off (e.g. classroom, school theatre or gym, community venue, local coffee shop or theatre, etc.) and can this venue accommodate your invited guests?
- when would you like your slam-off to take place?
- is there a budget or do funds need to be raised?

Slam-Off Logistics

Venue

Once you have decided on a venue, students need to make the necessary arrangements. Is the venue equipped with a stage, microphone, and lights, or will these need to be ordered, borrowed, or improvised? What is involved in set-up including light and sound checks, tables and/or chairs, decorations, etc.? Who will do what?

Invitations and Posters

Charging students with responsibility for invitations and posters (if it is a public or school-wide event) also makes for a great art and design lesson. Things to consider: intended audience, budget, handmade or digitally produced, all the same or all unique, mailing or electronic delivery, RSVPs, etc.

Publicity

If this is a public event,³⁴ you may want to include a Media Studies lesson. Students could be responsible for contacting the local media, writing and producing press releases and public service announcements, and distributing posters.

Refreshments

Food and drink add to the poetry slam ambiance! If you are serving refreshments, consider: cost-recovery or free, dietary needs of audience, budget, logistics of food-handling, buffet or table service. You should also consider the type of food being served (e.g. no crunching and chewing during the slam performances!) and when it will be served (before the

³⁴ A well-executed slam-off can be a great school fundraiser.

performances, intermission, during deliberations, etc.). Consider having students approach local restaurants and grocery stores for donations or discounts.

Décor

Your students or décor committee need to decide what decorations they would like to see in the venue. For slam visual art projects, see the next activity (below).

Hosting

Every slam needs a host—be it a student, teacher, administrator, or local artist or performer—and a script!

Prizes

You may want to award prizes or certificates to the slam-off winner(s). Consider: certificates or prizes, donations or expense, suitability for slam, etc.

Judges

Because we had three classes (in three different schools) and numerous partners, we had five judges for the SlammED Slam-Off: one student from each class (selected at random, in the spirit of slam) and two “impartial” judges who had not previously worked with the students (the Mendel’s Head of Public and Professional Programs and one sponsor representative). We encourage you to use student judges and randomly-picked judges. Someone also needs to be responsible for informing the judges of their duties and being available to answer their questions.

Recording the Slam-Off

Consider recording—photographs, audio and video taping, podcasting, or webcasting—your slam-off. Things to consider: equipment, expertise, release and consent forms (from parents/guardians and audience members), and technical support.

Clean-Up

Do not forget this most important (and most often overlooked) step. Consider venue clean-up, recycling and waste, food disposal or composting, putting away tables and chairs, and taking down the decorations.

ACTIVITY: Slam-Off Art Projects

This is an interdisciplinary program, and the more visual art you can do in conjunction with the slam-off, the better! The following are some suggestions for slam-off art projects.

Visual Art Slam Poems

You might call this reverse ekphrastic (see [Activity: Connecting Visual Art and Slam](#), above): visual art inspired by or responding to poetry. Have each student select a poem from their slam journals—or one of their peers' poems—and paint, draw, sculpt, or collage the poem, feelings expressed or evoked by the poem, visual images the poem conjures, abstract or figurative works inspired by the poem...like the ekphrastic poems inspired by visual art, there is no telling what art may be created! The only limits are the students' imaginations and your art supplies. The resulting artworks can be exhibited at the slam-off.

Table Centrepieces

For the SlammED slam-off, the Grade 5/6 class at Pleasant Hill Community School created a visual feast of lively and inspired centrepieces for the slam-off tables, from a plethora of materials—beads, plasticine, glue, markers, stickers, feathers, pipe-cleaners, and more.

Stage Decoration and Backdrop

Each class involved in the SlammED slam-off was charged with creating a collaborative artwork on a 4 x 8 foot piece of sturdy cardboard, reflecting the unique community that created them. One class created a graffiti scene, turning their base into a brick wall then adorned with images, text, and tags. You may also consider making murals, banners, sets, and other backdrops and stage decorations.

Tablecloths

For their poetry slam, Brenda Dyck's students decorated long sheets of white paper with slogans, images, and various forms of graffiti, then used them as tablecloths.³⁵ You may also consider providing each table with markers, crayons, pens, and pencils, so audience members can record their visual responses to the slam-off performances (following the student-established audience guidelines).

³⁵ Examples available online at http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/voice/voice069.shtml (included in Dyck's lesson plan, "A Poetry Slam Cures the Midwinter Blahs," on the *Education World* website).

ACTIVITY:
Slam-Off and Wrap

Checklist: you have poems and performers, visual art and décor, a booked venue and date, guests, an emcee...you should now have everything you need to execute an incredible, memorable slam-off. The Mendel's SlammED Slam-Off surpassed the greatest expectations of everyone involved in the program, and we are certain you will be beaming with pride (and perhaps shedding a tear). Good luck!

Following the slam-off, we suggest a debriefing session. Students may need this chance to review all of the pieces and steps involved in bringing the slam-off to fruition and reconnect the final production to the numerous activities in which they were engaged, the skills they developed, the knowledge and understanding gained, and the many multidisciplinary approaches they took to creative and critical expression.

They also need a chance to reflect on the process and provide input and constructive criticism about the SlammED program. For this, you may consider an anonymous evaluation form. For SlammED, students and teachers evaluated the program coordinator, Mendel Art Gallery liaisons, and the participating artists. They also provided answers to the following questions:

- What did you enjoy most about the SlammED Project, and why?
- What did you enjoy least, and why?
- How could we improve SlammED?
- How would you describe your experience as a participant in SlammED?
- Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?

Invite students to share their assessments, constructive criticisms, suggestions, and opinions in an open forum. Also, encourage them to make recommendations for future SlammED programs in your school.

Ask students what they would like to "do now," post-slam-off. For example, one student pursued the possibility of slam finalists performing their poems at their Grade 8 graduation ceremony. Another class made copies of all of their slam poems, as a permanent archive and, potentially, a published anthology. Tap into the post-slam-off excitement and explore the possibilities!

APPENDIX I – Slam Resources¹

Slam and Spoken Word

PRINT

Bum Rush the Page: A Def Poetry Jam. Ed. Tony Medina and Louis Reyes Rivers. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001.

Listen Up! Spoken Word Poetry. Ed. Zoe Anglesey. New York: Ballentine/One World Publishers, 1999.

Poetry Slam: The Competitive Art of Performance Poetry. Ed. Gary Mex Glazner. San Francisco: Manic D Press, 2000.

Russell Simmons Def Poetry Jam on Broadway...and More. Ed. Danny Simmons. Conceived by Stan Latham and Russell Simmons. New York: Atria Books, 2003.

Slam. Eds. Richard Stratton and Kim Wozencraft. New York: Grove Press, 1998.

Smith, Marc Kelly with Joe Kraynak. *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Slam Poetry* (book and audio CD). New York: Alpha Books, 2004.

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TELEVISION

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VHS/DVD

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love jones. Dir. Theodore Witcher. Alliance (Universal), 1997.

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AUDIO/CD

Carnivocal: A Celebration of Sound Poetry (various artists), Ed. Douglas Barbour and Stephen Scobie, Red Deer Press, 2002.

¹ We suggest that educators preview all material beforehand. Slam is very powerful and evocative, and content and language may be considered violent, graphic, or too mature for some students. Use your discretion in selecting material suitable for your classroom community.

The CBC Poetry Face-Off. various artists. CBC Audio. 2004-2007 (annual CD compilation).

Poetry Slam, Inc. various slam audio CDs and tracks available for purchase at http://poetryslam.com/index.php?page=shop.browse&category_id=8&option=com_virtuemart&Itemid=29.

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ONLINE

SLAM AND SPOKEN WORD POETRY - GENERAL

St. Louis, Al. *When Words are Spoken* <<http://www.whenwordsarespoken.com>>

Poetry Slam, Inc. <<http://poetryslam.com>>

POETS' AND ARTISTS' WEB SITES

Allen, Lilian <<http://www.dubpoetscollective.com/collective.html>>

Cooper, Afua <<http://www.dubpoetscollective.com/afuacooper.html>>

Eekwol <<http://www.myspace.com/eekwol>>

Koyczan, Shane <<http://www.koyczan.com/>>

Mali, Taylor <<http://www.taylormali.com/index.cfm?webid=11>>

McLeod, Brenden <brendanmcLeod.ca.nationprotect.net/index.htm>

Swan, Patrick <<http://www.myspace.com/patrickswan>>

Ulysses, Magpie <<http://www.myspace.com/madameulysses>>

POET AND ARTIST COLLECTIVES

Capital Poetry Collective, Capital Slam <<http://www.capital slam.com>>

Dub Poets Collective <<http://www.dubpoetscollective.com>>

POETRY SLAM COMPETITIONS

Individual World Poetry Slam <<http://www.individualworldpoetryslam.com/>>

National Poetry Slam (USA) <<http://nps2007.com/>>

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TELEVISION

Ice-T's Rap School. VH1. 2007.

AUDIO

Eekwol. *Apprentice to the Mystery*. Mills Productions, 2004.

WEBSITES

def SOL Productions – Hip Hop Saskatoon <<http://www.defsol.ca>>

Flocabulary: Hip-Hop in the Classroom. <<http://www.flocabulary.com/freestylrap>>

APPENDIX II – Selected poems, SlammED 2007**Best Slam Award
slammED 2007****Untitled**

Alexandra, Grade 8, St. John Community School

I'd like to start by saying sorry to Ms. Kolysher, Robin and Natalie because in spite of all the class time, and help you've given me I haven't written you a poem.

Just in case you were wondering why I haven't written anything it is because my thoughts are very confidential. Trust me your innocent ears can't handle listening to a poem of mine anyways. If I ever read one of my poems to you you'd wish you were dead.

You know I'm not like that, I am just way too shy to read a poem to you. I am swelled up with fear. I feel as if everyone will laugh at me if they heard me read a poem I wrote. I'm just about to cry I feel like I'm just about to throw up.

Had you fooled, didn't I? There's no way I feel scared and it is impossible to make me cry. I haven't written anything because there is absolutely nothing going on in my brain. I have a head filled with straw I can't feel a thing. I have no emotions I am pretty much lifeless. Besides if I had ever written a poem you'd think you were listening to the dairy channel—all cheese 24/7. My mind is like a cheese buffet.

That was all a total lie. The truth is that I have a life-threatening blood disorder called stickittothemanifitus. This disorder causes me to lose my breath and makes me very weak and tired. I wanted to write you a poem but I was in the hospital all week and when I got home I wanted to rest so I can write when I wake up but my mom being such an Asian wouldn't stop singing karaoke and my dad being Cuban kept offering me sugar cane and black beans. It kept me up all night.

I can't breathe, hey hottie do you know CPR because you take my breath away. Don't laugh! This isn't a joke, a joke would be me calling you a cow. But I don't joke around with my life so please give me some mouth to mouth.

You probably knew I was just saying that because I wanted to kiss him.

So if you are still wondering why I didn't write a poem, well I sorta did and you sorta just heard it.

**Slam Spirit Award
slammED 2007**

My Cat

Brandy, Grade 5, Pleasant Hill Community School

My kitten is not tiny anymore
she is a cat.
My kitten is not skinny anymore
she is fat.
My full grown kitten still loves to hide in a hat.
My not tiny hat-hiding cat saw a big bat.

But I love my fat cat
she is my special cat.
My special cat caught a big ugly rat.
My cat was running and fell on a mat.
My cat's favourite food is choc-o-late.
And that's that.

**Most Courageous Voice
slammED 2007**

Living in Hell

Chelsea, Grade 8, St. John Community School

I'll tell you a little story about me
about how I dream of being free
living this life God has given me
I hated it more than I hate to breathe.
She wants to keep on going
but she doesn't think she can do it.
She tries
only bit by bit...

Living in hell isn't so bad
so it may seem
listening to all the cursing and the words
they scream
getting cut down almost every day
it kinda comes natural
I should say...
I've gotten used to all the backstabbing
and lies

Now it's just all about the crying inside.

It all sounds horrible, I know
It's kinda like sitting in a movie theatre
watching a show
You don't really feel the pain
unless you're the character
And in the end
no one knows what happens to her
no one pays attention
until she leaves
and has to go
six feet under
now they know.

It wasn't just all about watching a show.
It was about a fourteen year-old girl
selling her soul.

**Best Recovery
slammED 2007**

Coffin

Malina, Grade 8, St. John Community School

I don't want to do this anymore
because this life is so cold...

I can't even get warm
or breathe air
in this world.

This world is so cold
I can't do this no more.
This thing in my heart is saying: do not go
there

saying: you're dead.

I hate it so much that I do not like being
alive.

I hate this place,
I don't know how I got here
I just know that I am here so
why can't I get out of here?

I wonder all the time how I got here

why I'm here
and why can't I get out of this
place?
I look for a way
to get out of this place
but I can't bear the air of this place
I can't move because I'm already dead
in this place.

My soul is stuck in this coffin,
that's why I can't move
or get out
and

it's
all
your
fault!

**Most Energetic
slammED 2007**

Someday

Tanner, Grade 6, North Park Wilson School

Someday I'll grow up
Someday I'll shut up
Someday I'll throw up

Someday I'll fly up
Someday I'll fly down
and hit my face on the ground.

I Don't Understand

Stella, Grade 5, Pleasant Hill Community School

I don't understand
 why people are blind
 why people can't stop drinking
 why people kill other people.

But most of all
 why I don't get my birthday present
 why dogs run away

why my cat died
 why do we have robbers.

What I understand most is
 why people grow
 why we play
 why do we have a playground.

Untitled

Beth, Grade 7, North Park Wilson School

The mirror never lies
 But it doesn't always tell the truth.
 Just because its piercing eyes can't see me,
 Doesn't mean I'm gone forever.
 I don't always look this way.

Showing off for something that speaks so
 strong,
 But doesn't care.
 But the mirror speaks a silent, broken truth.
 What is there will remain, and I am always
 me.

I Am

Donny, Grade 5, Pleasant Hill Community School

I am
 life, love, family
 education and friends are important to me
 smart, funny, honest are important to me

I will be
 a cop, a man, a friend
 I will be living in Saskatoon
 enough money and very happy.

Untitled

Rae, Grade 6, North Park Wilson School

It's funny how we cry
 inside but keep smiling
 on the out
 it's funny how we scream
 inside but no one
 hears a thing
 it's funny how we're

all so broken and no
 one can see a crack
 and it's funny how
 we hide ourselves
 when we're all the
 same inside.

My Day

Katrina, Grade 6, North Park Wilson School

Today is my day,
you got it?
o.k, good.
I'm going to lay down the rules.
I'm not going to care,

I'm not going to help,
Not today,
Not tomorrow,
My day,
My life.

Untitled

Lawrence, Grade 8, St. John Community School

Nod more frongs with wongs with wongs all the ongols I man pot concrit in mevons I'd always walk home alone so I become lifeless just lick me tolophon. There's nothing to loz when no one knows your name. There's nothing to loz but the laws don't seem to change.

She's Alone

Chelse, Grade 8, St. John Community School

The worst thing you can feel is pain,
most of the time you feel sad,
and feel so mad,
at times you feel unloved, and forgotten,
you feel so hurt
you can't stop crying,
you have all this stuff going through your
mind
it's just confusing that it hurts the most,
you feel like someone is trying to stab you
in the heart...
if it makes you feel better

you always have someone there for you,
but still night
after night
she cries alone,
she sees all her friends happy,
so she tries not to let them see her pain,
she walks home alone,
and sleeps alone,
hearing voices telling her:
you're nothing to me,
just leave,
now die.

I Am

Timothy, Grade 6, Pleasant Hill Community School

Work, love, honesty
are important to me
happy, helpful, respectful
are important to me

I am.

Untitled

Erin, Grade 7, North Park Wilson School

In a small town in Scotland,
they sell books with one blank page.
I don't know why.
No one does.
Everybody just wonders.
Nobody has ever even attempted to figure
it out.

No one seems to care.
But I do.
Me and my friends.
We always rip out the blank page.
Usually with our teeth.

Untitled

Ali, Grade 7, North Park Wilson School

I looked into the mirror
I saw my face
staring back at me.
I tell myself I'm ugly,
with ugly hair
ratty clothes,
teary eyes,
and a sad looking life.

But then, I see the real me,
a fun personality,
a great heart,
and I tell myself that I'm beautiful.

And I take back everything I said before.

Untitled

Myron, Grade 5, Pleasant Hill Community School

I walked along and saw a bear.
I said
 My goodness. Look over there!

I once saw a bat wearing a hat.

My, look at that!

I went to town and jumped around
with a clown.

Untitled

Anonymous, Grade 8, St. John Community School

I have it so hard in my life,
Because all I want to do is fight,
Because life is just one big fight,
I always use hatred when I fight,
Who does not like to fight,

What does it mean to fight,
Why not, I should just end my life,
No matter what you will still lose your life,
That's why I like to fight.

Untitled

Alex, Grade 8, St. John Community School

Bicycles have seven is the answer to the person who's strange in house that are small that things go oddly shaped hamburgers that explode with 7 gauge shotguns set the flare to rest in the middle of winter medicine heals things are fly my in the book made of pencils in the Pluto is a cartoon of ... in the moon 1963 is ... but also the dog started barking aliens could exist satellites burning out microwaves look things baths are for cleaning paper believe that game bad on the other side of the world then time gone under ground as the afternoon teacher spoke with march got real cold as cats made motorcycles and holes in my soup as flies dug into trees prehistoric people lightning struck cars were parked the plane landed safely and the road had to be fitted as deer drank coffee in the afternoon the game wasn't bad but could be better the ghost landed in mars greater in Europe then the telepathic described the odd shaped triangles equal social accusations the sound went wild the stars went blue as skies were cracking the clouds are the soft boiled eggs and souly trained peas turkey like to eat horses the apple hit his ... the computer broke as the chair went loopy the slinger sly slow went up the alley on the side of the building dug dream of potatoes talking to bananas.

Summer

Kayla, Grade 6, North Park Wilson School

crash, bang, smash
I hate whiplash
my bike is trash
I got a big gash

I don't want another crash
gonna wear a mask
crash, bang, smash

From the tip of my toes

Megan, Grade 8, St. John Community School

From the tip of my toes,
To the words unsaid,
from the highest of heavens,
To right under my bed,
These monsters they follow me
They do not hurt me at all,
These monsters they follow me
Ones small, big, and tall!
For I am not afraid they shield me from
night,
For I am not afraid they hide me from fright,

When it seems that this world is too big to
hold,
My tall little friends for this they unfold,
running and laughing,
singing and smiling,
counting the start
from the tip of my toes
to the words unsaid
from the highest of heavens
to right under my bed.

Untitled

Jonny, Grade 8, St. John Community School

I am bored
 I wonder if I can go home
 I hear you
 I see people
 I want to be at home
 I am bored

I pretend to fart
 I feel bored
 I touch you
 I worry about you
 I cry about you
 I am bored.

Sidekick

Jarett, Grade 7, North Park Wilson School

There is someone standing next to me.
 It's my sidekick.
 She is smaller than me.

I like twinkies.
 She is not a twinkie. Aw.

Untitled

Jordan, Grade 6, North Park Wilson School

One window is all I need
 to see me fly
 to see flying cars
 to see bugs

to see mutated Zombies
 who will eat everything
 to see me again.

The game winner

Jeremy, Grade 8, St. John Community School

I am up to bat
 I hit the ball into the outfield
 I run to first
 I get a speed burst
 I run to second
 I get past them

I run to third
 I run into a bird
 I run home
 and go to sleep
 for another day awaiting me.

Untitled

Ryan, Grade 8, St. John Community School

There was a monkey walking in the city. He seen a bunch of kids on skateboards and wanted one too so he goes home and asks if he can get one. He has one now so he can join the kids, but the kids laugh at him. 3 days later he tries the halfpipe and makes it. Everyone likes him now and he becomes famous.

Bull Durham Credo (I Believe)

Anonymous, Grade 7, North Park Wilson School

I believe in sunshine behind the clouds
 the light after the darkness
 the flowers after snow
 the green growth after brown
 the life after death,
 sickness to health,
 young to old, poor to wealth.

But one chance is wrong.
 I believe in stars in the night sky
 I believe in the good and the bad
 I believe in tears of joy, rain in a drought
 happiness in sorrow, a comforting hug.
 I believe in friends who stick with you,
 through thick and thin, good times and bad.

Untitled

Vincent, Grade 8, St. John Community School

I don't know why I like music.
 I guess it's cause I can describe
 myself through the music I listen to.

I could listen to that hard core rock stuff...but that is just not me.
 I could also listen to country...but it's way too sappy.
 But I like music.

I don't know why I like music.
 I guess it's cause I can describe
 myself through the music I listen to.

I listen to old rappers
 like Eazy-E, D12, NAS, and classified.
 I also like new rappers
 like Jibbs, Young Jeezy.
 I just like music.

APPENDIX III: Judging Tally Sheet



Instructions:

Please record each judge's score for each poet. For poet's total, drop the lowest and highest scores and add the remaining three (for a score out of 30 possible points). Judges may use half-marks (0.5). Please do not give any scores below 5.0.

Judges:

#1 _____ #4 _____
 #2 _____ #5 _____
 #3 _____

Slam Poet	Judge 1	Judge 2	Judge 3	Judge 4	Judge 5	Total /30
Student 1						
Student 2						
Student 3						
Student 4, etc.						