

EDUCATOR GUIDE

Story Theme: The Next Generation
Subject: Youth Speaks
Discipline: Theater (Spoken Word)

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Youth poet Yalie Kamara performing at the Youth Speaks Semi-Final Teen Poetry Slam in San Francisco, March 29, 2003.
Still image from SPARK story, 2003.

SECTION I - OVERVIEW

EPISODE THEME

The Next Generation

SUBJECT

Youth Speaks

GRADE RANGES

K-12 & Post-secondary

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Visual Arts & Language Arts

OBJECTIVE

To introduce students to the concept and culture of spoken word.

STORY SYNOPSIS

Spark follows several local teens as they make their way through the final tension-filled rounds of the Youth Speaks spoken word competitions, and get a glimpse of their lives and thoughts in their emotion-packed poetry.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

- Individual student writings
- Individual student verbal presentations
- Group process and feedback (critique)
- Individual student self-reflection and critique

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

To introduce students to spoken work through the craft of poetry and creative writing

To introduce students to the concept of “poetic voice”

To provide strategies for students to find their own voice through writing

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES (continued)

To help students learn to write and edit their own words

To develop students foundational listening, writing, and speaking skills

To foster a supportive and safe creative environment in which all students are empowered to explore and share issues of importance to them using their own words

EQUIPMENT NEEDED

SPARK story “Youth Speaks” on DVD or VHS and appropriate player and TV set

Computer with Internet access, navigation software, speakers and a sound card, and color printer

MATERIALS NEEDED

Paper & pencils

Access to libraries with up-to-date collections of periodicals, books, and research papers

INTELLIGENCES ADDRESSED

Linguistic - syntax, phonology, semantics, pragmatics

Interpersonal - awareness of others’ feelings, emotions, goals, motivations

Intrapersonal - awareness of one’s own feelings, emotions, goals, motivations



See more information on
[Multiple Intelligences at
www.kqed.org/spark/education.](http://www.kqed.org/spark/education)

SECTION II – CONTENT/CONTEXT

CONTENT OVERVIEW

In the SPARK story “The Next Generation,” audiences go inside Youth Speaks, a San Francisco-based non-profit dedicated to helping young people find a poetic and creative expression through programs lead by experienced poets and writers, presentation opportunities, competitions, and collaborative experiences with other young people.



Yalie and Emiliano backstage with their fellow poets at the Semi-Final Teen Poetry Slam in San Francisco, March 29, 2003. Still image from SPARK story, April 2003.

Founded in 1996 in San Francisco, Youth Speaks is the premier youth poetry, spoken word, and creative writing program in the country, with sister-programs recently opened in New York and Seattle. Creators of events like the Teen Poetry Slam, Brave New Voices, and the Bringing the Noise Reading Series, Youth Speaks has been instrumental in popularizing a fresh new performative style of poetry amongst young people. The organization offers in-school and after school programs for young people, as well as workshops in professional development for teachers.

The Living Word Project, the multi-generational arm of Youth Speaks, hosts the largest local ongoing poetry slam in the country with more than 400 people attending the event each month at San Francisco's Justice League. Through the California Arts Council, Youth Speaks has recently begun a Writers-in-Residence Program for writers in their twenties, who in turn help to conduct workshops with teens. Youth Speaks also publishes chapbooks, CDs, videos, and hosts a website that details programs, events, and

student work. Each year Youth Speaks records the incredibly popular Teen Poetry Slam for release on their [Bringing the Noise CD](#).

Whether working with students or teachers, Youth Speaks' goal is the same: to encourage people to engage with spoken word in an effort to develop their abilities to read, write, revise, edit and present their ideas, and to share themselves. In the Spark story, we follow two young spoken word artists--18-year old Yalie Kamara, and a 14-year old Emiliano Bourgois-Chacon--as they wrestle through the creative writing process and hone their writing and presentation talents to compete in the local poetry semi-finals in the hope of winning a place on the San Francisco team that will advance to the next level.

THE BIG PICTURE

The origin of spoken word performance is difficult to attribute to any one event or cultural practice. Some would argue that there has been spoken word since we as humans first began to speak. Others say the West African musical tradition of *griot*-- a bard or storyteller who recounts cultural stories through song--is the origin of spoken word. Still others say that it was the bebop jazz artists of the 1940s who first began to fuse spoken words with music as a way of making personal and social statements.

Regardless of its origins, this dynamic form of living poetry is alive and well today. There are many sub-genres in spoken word, including slam, hip hop poetry, and rap. The process of engaging with spoken word involves writing words for speaking--writing in order to be heard-- rather than speaking what was written--writing for the page. Historically, spoken word has been broadly conceived, including many forms of writing and public speaking such as poetry, creative writing, non-fiction essays, political speeches, litigated arguments, chronicled discoveries, religious sermons, and academic papers.

THE BIG PICTURE (continued)

Many spoken word organizations count these forms as well as more contemporary forms of spoken word as part of the whole genre.

Programs like those offered by Youth Speaks provide critical opportunities for young people to begin to consider what they think and believe about themselves and the world they live in, to organize their thoughts, to revise and edit their words, and to consider how to present themselves and their ideas. In the last 10 years, spoken word has received increased attention as the numbers of participants continues to grow and the important relationship between literacy and self-confidence and spoken word is further elucidated. Every state in the country has spirited and motivated spoken word organizations and opportunities, including poetry slams, retreats, contests, festivals, and drop-in workshops for anyone interested. Many participate in local, regional and/or large competitions and festivals where young people get a chance to hear the perspectives of youths they might never otherwise have heard or met.

At its core, spoken word is about individual self-knowledge, truth, expression, and communication. Through the processes of writing, editing, and speaking, engagement with the spoken word provides a unique forum for sharing ideas, receiving feedback, and reflection in a creative forum.

Speaking our words means sharing our individual truths, and in so doing, it reflects the core principles of our society of free speech and equality. Some spoken word performances can be lyrical, rhyming, and melodious, while others are confrontational, staccato, and discordant. Uniting literacy and theatre, spoken word affords writers and listeners the opportunity to think, listen, speak, and respect our individual perspectives.



Youth poet Emiliano Bourgois-Chacon speaks his mind. Still image from SPARK story, April 2003.

SECTION III – RESOURCES

TEXTS

American Poetry Review - poetry, translations, critical & craft essays in newsprint tabloid format, offering a broad sampling of mainstream & not-so-mainstream poetry, selected samples available at the Web site.

Angelsey, Zoe. Listen Up! New York: One World/Ballantine, 1999.

Bonair-Agard, Roger, et al. Burning Down the House: Selected Poems from the Nuyorican Poets Cafe's National Poetry Slam Champions. Brooklyn, NY: Soft Skull Press, 2000.

Eleveld, Mark, ed., The Spoken Word Revolution: Slam, Hip Hop & the Poetry of a New Generation. New York: Sourcebooks Trade, 2003.

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

Reed, Ishmael, ed. From Totems to Hip-Hop: A Multicultural Anthology of Poetry Across the Americas, 1900-2002. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2002.

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

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

Swados, Elizabeth. Hey You! C'Mere: A Poetry Slam. New York: Art Asylum, 2002.
The Atlantic Monthly's Poetry Pages - Poems published in The Atlantic Monthly since the debut of Atlantic Unbound are here for the taking, as text or audio readings.

TEXTS (continued)

Titus, Andrew, ed. Poetry Slam: Speaking Poetry, the Alien Language of Choice. Frederickton, NB: Broken Jaw Press, 1999.

Traffic – A publication of the Small Press Traffic featuring literary essays, reviews, poems and events – <http://www.smallpresstraffic.org>

Von Ziegesar, Cecily, ed. Slam. New York: Penguin Books, 2000.

Young People's Press Online - Free national news service for youth publishing youth writing from youth 14-24 in over 200 newspapers across North America, including non-fiction, opinion pieces, soft or hard news stories, or features - <http://www.ypp.net>.

WEB SITES

Academy of American Poets – Organization supporting American poets and fostering the appreciation of contemporary poetry, including national programs and awards, such as the Wallace Stevens Award, the Walt Whitman Award, and many more - <http://www.poets.org>

Berkeley Slam – Web site for weekly spoken word event organization meeting at the Starry Plough in Berkeley, including events, finalists, and advocacy - <http://www.daniland.com/slam>.

California Poets in the Schools (CPITS) – San Francisco non-profit organization placing professional poets in the schools to teach young people - <http://www.cpits.org>.

Historical Voices – Organization dedicated to creating a national, searchable online database of spoken word resources from the 20th century; includes links, research, and a teacher lesson plan – <http://www.historicalvoices.org>.

WEB SITES (continued)

History & Politics Out Loud – Component effort of Historical Voices offering a database of politically significant audio materials for teachers, youth, and the general public - <http://www.hpol.org>.

Isangmahal Collective, The – A Seattle-based non-profit dedicated to cultivating the mind through “progressive and conscious” art. The collective includes spoken word artists, poets, musicians, visual artists, deejays, actors, dancers, theatre artists, and more - <http://www.isangmahal.org/index.htm>.

Mad Lab Creative – Exceptionally hip Web site featuring spoken word works with animation and music - <http://www.madlabcreative.com>.

National Gallery of the Spoken Word - Michigan State University program dedicated to preserving American spoken word recordings vital to the country, from Alexander Graham Bell’s first recording to Supreme Court decisions to important political speeches, all organized in galleries, most immediately accessible by listening audio programs - <http://www.historicalvoices.org/galleries.php>

Poetic Dream – Bay Area photographer David Huang’s Web site documenting youth poetry slams, spoken word events, festivals, etc - <http://www.poeticdream.com>.

Poetic License – documentary film about spoken word, Web site showcases youth programs, teacher education, and a film archive - <http://www.itvs.org/poeticlicense>.

Poetry Television – Films of San Francisco and Bay Area poetry events on the Web, including links to other spoken word film sites - <http://www.poetrytelevision.com>.

Speak Out Now - Institute for Democratic Education and Culture – America’s only national non-profit organization promoting progressive speakers and artists on college campuses and in communities on domestic and international issues through artistic and educational forums - <http://www.speakoutnow.org>.

Young Leaves - Web site of the Yuki Teikei Haiku Society, a monthly meeting group of 90+ poets dedicated to the writing and preservation of Haiku poetry - http://www.youngleaves.org/about_us/index.htm.

Youth Speaks – including listings of workshops and events, school and after school programs, organizational mission, national Youth Speaks, Teen Slams and other spoken word programs - <http://www.youthspeaks.org>.

BAY AREA SPOKEN WORD EVENTS

Many Bay Area cafes, bookstores, and organizations that support art, youth and literacy offer ongoing spoken word, slams and poetry events. A few are listed below, but check your local papers and favorite websites for updates and current listings.

<http://listings.sfweekly.com>

<http://www.sfbg.com>

<http://listings.eastbayexpress.com>

<http://www.sfstation.com/classification.php?key=AL>
(search key words: poetry, spoken word)

***NOTE: As with any event at which both young people and adults are welcome, adults are encouraged to check out the venue and the events beforehand to make sure they are appropriate for their students and/or children.*

SAN FRANCISCO

Friday Night Poetry at the Yak

Spoken word, open mike, and acoustic music are the fare at this regular event. Fridays, 7:30 p.m., free. [Yakkety Yak Coffeehouse](#), 679 Sutter (at Taylor), San Francisco, 415-351-2090.

Poetry and Pizza

A \$5 donation gives you license to attack an all-you-can-eat buffet of thin-crust New York-style pizza as you dig the work of local bards. Last Friday of every month, 7:30 p.m., \$5.

<http://www.poetryandpizza.homestead.com> [Escape From New York Pizza](#), 333 Bush Street, (at Kearny), San Francisco, 415-421-0700.

BAY AREA SPOKEN WORD EVENTS (continued)

SAN FRANCISCO

The Vowel Movement

A monthly all-ages beatboxing event hosted by Kid Beyond and Tim Barsky. First Tuesday of every month, \$7-\$15. [Studio Z](#), 314 11th St. (at Folsom), San Francisco, 415-252-7666, <http://www.studioz.tv>.

Weekly Open-Mike/Talent Showcase-Poets, musicians, and comics are invited to step right up and present their act to a waiting audience. All present are also eligible to win four free hours of studio recording time. Wednesdays, 7:30 p.m., free. [The Canvas Cafe and Gallery](#), 1200 Ninth Ave. (at Lincoln), San Francisco, 415-504-0060, <http://www.thecanvasgallery.com>.

EAST BAY

Oakland Mic-Youth Speaks presents a monthly under-21 open mic hosted by Meilani Clay and Katy Turchin and featuring dancing to DJ Dion Decibels. Second Friday of every month, 7 p.m., free, 415-255-9035. <http://www.youthspeaks.org> [Pro Arts](#), 550 2nd St., Oakland, 510-763-4361, <http://www.proartsgallery.org>.

By the Light of the Moon-Karen Broder invites all women, with all forms of creativity in all stages of development, to share and try out new and vulnerable material in a safe, welcoming environment. Polished work always welcome too. Bring your poetry, music, and stories to share. Call 510-482-1315 or come early to sign up. Second Friday of every month, 7 p.m., \$3-\$7 sliding scale. [Change Makers](#), 6536 Telegraph Ave., Oakland, 510-655-2405, <http://www.changemakersforwomen.com>.

Café Poetry-Featured readers and an open mic. Richard Moore, aka Paradise Freejahlove, and Kira Allen host alternating sessions. Wednesdays, 7:30 p.m., donation requested. [La Peña Cultural Center](#), 3105 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley, 510-849-2568, <http://www.lapena.org>.

EAST BAY (continued)

The Berkeley Slam- weekly spoken word celebration and tournament that features internationally renowned poets, storytellers, comedians, and emcees. Every Wednesday at The Starry Plough 3101 Shattuck Ave, Berkeley, (510) 841-2082, <http://www.starryploughpub.com/poetryslam.html>

Second Wednesdays-A drop-in poetry writing workshop for all ages, led by Albany poet and teacher Alison Seevak. Second Wednesday of every month, 7-9 p.m., free. [Albany Library](#), 1249 Marin Ave., Albany, 510-526-3720.

SECTION IV – VOCABULARY

DISCIPLINE-BASED VOCABULARY & CONCEPTS IN THE SPARK STORY

Audience

People assembled to observe, listen to, or engage with a performance or presentation

Courage

Mental or moral strength to address fear or intimidation

Creed

A fundamental belief or philosophy

Editing

To alter, adapt, change, or otherwise refine for the sake of continuity, consistency, or clarity

Empowering

To promote the self-realization or improvement of

Estrange

The development of indifference or hostility with consequent separation

Feedback

Verbal or written responses by others provided for the purpose of improvement

Finals

The last level of qualifying competition for another, higher level of competition, or the last series of competitions

Fungus

Any of a major group of spore producing organisms that lack chlorophyll

Gasp

To struggle for breath

Ingest

To take in, consume, or otherwise absorb
Intentions
Something one purposefully brings into being

Local

Of or pertaining to a specific place or region

Poetry

A form of writing that formulates a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience in language chosen and arranged to create a specific emotional response through meaning, sound, and rhythm

Rap

The rap is a vocal style halfway enters stressed and sung, always in rhymes and resting on rhythmic strongly syncopated (i.e. to rap: to strike)

Rectify

To set right or correct by removing errors or mistakes

Rhythm

An ordered recurring alternation of strong and weak elements in the flow of sound and silence in speech

Slam

A poetry or spoken word event or competition

Subconscious

Part of the mind or behavior not dictated by intention or aware directed action

Wisdom

Accumulated learning or knowledge

SECTION V – ENGAGING WITH SPARK

STANDARDS-BASED ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS

Listening to Different Forms of Spoken Word

As a group, listen to a presentation of spoken word on a CD, DVD, or on the Internet. Listen first without disruption. Prepare students to listen again, this time making notes about the emotive or affective language used by the speaker – those words around which the emotional content or message pivots. (If a transcript is available, this can also be helpful as a handout.) Challenge students to identify the techniques that speakers use to communicate their message(s), such as figurative language, words and concepts that evoke emotions, and/or elliptical language that place the listener in a certain position (invoking guilt, patriotism, empathy, etc.).

Move on to ask the group to consider a single poem or short essay by a writer (see Yalie Kumara’s and Emiliano Bourgois-Chacon’s poems attached). Talk about how the work communicates, and what it is “about.” Ask for a volunteer to read the poem aloud, placing verbal emphases where s/he thinks they should be. Ask another student to read the work, intoning her/his own emphases. Talk about the differences in the readings. What affects the differences? Does this affect how it’s received?

Draw the discussion together by asking students to consider the different forms of spoken word, such as orated poetry or creative writings, court or legal decisions, scientific discoveries, national events, and/or political or academic speeches. As a group, talk about the different forms of spoken word, making lists of the adjectives that describe each type. Talk about the similarities and differences of the forms of writing and spoken word.

Making Spoken Word Presentations

Listen to the political speeches of different leaders, such as Presidents, Chiefs of State, Supreme Court Justices, and political activists and religious leaders. Ask student to identify the kinds of words used by these figures, making lists on the board. What are the different types of words employed by the different people in different circumstances? What do the words have to do with the content and the audience? Consider what messages are being delivered and how?

Read the New York Times or other national news report and discuss a selected article. In round-table discussion format, ask students to explore their reactions to the event, as well as related issues such as national security, government reactions, and media coverage following the event. Challenge students to write a 50-word piece about the event, including their reaction to what happened.

Ask students to rework or compose the piece so that it can be read aloud. Engaging with spoken word involves writing words for speaking--writing in order to be heard-- rather than speaking what was written--writing for the page. Discuss the difference in approach, referring back to the earlier discussion of the words used by political leaders or religious speakers to illustrate the importance of using appropriate language to achieve the desired effect. Advise students to limit the length, vocabulary, meter, and/or format to make it easier or more challenging.

Making Spoken Word Presentations (continued)

Invite students to share their works with the class by making spoken word presentations. Ensure that there is time for discussion afterwards so that students can share their perceptions with each other about their work, and offer constructive advice about what was successful and where the student might make changes to better get his/her point across.

SPARKLERS:

* Using the Youth Speaks technique, ask students to write 12 questions to which the answer is “you” such as the student poets do in the SPARK story. Once completed, share them as a group. Challenge students to transform the 12 questions into a single poem to be read to the class.

* Ask students to write down 4-5 adjectives that best describe them and then to write a short 50 to 75-word piece about themselves, using these adjectives. Invite students to share their works with the class by making spoken word presentations. Offer an opportunity for discussion and constructive feedback.

RELATED STANDARDS

LANGUAGE ARTS

Grade 5

LISTENING AND SPEAKING

- 1.4 Select a focus, organizational structure, and point of view for an oral presentation.
- 1.6 Engage the audience with appropriate verbal cues, facial expressions, and gestures
- 2.1 Deliver narrative presentations:
 - a. Establish a situation, plot, point of view, and setting with descriptive words and phrases.

Grade 11 & 12

READING

- 3.3. Analyze the ways in which irony, tone, mood, the author's style, and the "sound" of language achieve specific rhetorical or aesthetic purposes or both. Analyze ways in which poets use imagery, personification, figures of speech, and sounds to evoke readers' emotions.
- 2.5 Recite poems, selections from speeches, or dramatic soliloquies with attention to performance details to achieve clarity, force, and aesthetic effect and to demonstrate an understanding of the meaning (e.g., Hamlet's soliloquy "To Be or Not to Be").

Attending a Spoken Word Performance

Suggest that students form groups or pairs and visit an event listed under the Bay Area Spoken Word section in this guide, or found by searching keywords “poetry” or “spoken word” under events listings on the following sites:

<http://listings.sfweekly.com>

<http://www.sfbg.com>

<http://listings.eastbayexpress.com>

Groups should opt to attend different performance events, featuring primarily women, youth, black performance artists, local or touring artists, or political poets etc. It would be interesting for the groups to attend as wide a range of spoken word performances as possible. Students should also feel able to participate in the event if they have work to perform.

Challenge each student to write a 600 word review of the event, including:

- the name and location of the venue
- information about the different performers
- the themes of their pieces
- the sub-genre of spoken word, including slam, hip hop poetry, and rap as well as other forms such a improv and dance
- the impact and power of the work
- the audience response(s)

Ask students to read selections from their reviews to offer a flavor of the event and to share their response to the occasion. If students are engaged by spoken word as a performance art, consider contacting Youth Speaks <http://www.youthspeaks.org>, or one of the artists they have seen or know about to lead a workshop for the class.

Attending a Spoken Word Performance (continued)

As a concluding activity, initiate a discussion on spoken word as an art form that includes a variety of sub-genres, and represents a social phenomena that gives a voice to the ideas and concerns of people in our communities who are not usually heard.

RELATED STANDARDS

LANGUAGE ARTS

Grade 5

4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING

Critical Assessment of Theatre

4.1 Develop and apply appropriate criteria for critiquing the work of actors, directors, writers and technical artists in theatre, film, and video.

Grade 7

4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING- *Derivation of Meaning from Works of Theatre*

4.2 Explain how cultural influences affect the content or meaning of works of theatre.

Grades 9-12 Proficient & Advanced

5.0 CONNECTIONS, RELATIONS, APPLICATIONS

Connections and Applications

5.1 Describe how skills acquired in theatre may be applied to other content areas and careers.

SECTION VI – SPOKEN WORD FEATURED ON SPARK

NOTE: The two poems included here by Yalie Kumara and Emiliano Bourgois-Chacon may not be performed or reprinted for any reason. These originals have been edited to reflect only those lines read in the Youth Speaks SPARK story about Youth Speaks.

“Dear Father”

by Yalie Kumara

Dear Father,
18 years and some months ago
An unnamed baby girl almost
 drowned in her mother’s belly.
No, not from amniotic fluid
 complications or even a defiant
 umbilical cord,
But because her mother’s ingested
Tears began to flood her surroundings
And little Baby Girl was too weak and
 too feeble to cup her hands to
 create any type of barrier to
 protect her still-forming mind.
So, ultimately, for she,
The ultimatum was,
Baby Girl die before existing to the
 world,
Or, Baby Girl do something.
So, with inner voice Baby Girl took
 latter choice
And with her head held to the sky of
 her mother’s womb
She, too, began to ingest the legacy
And this is how she was born.
Gasping for air, subconsciously aware
 that something was not there.
Gasping for air, subconsciously aware
 that something, in the form of
 a someone, was not there.

And you could hear it in her voice...
For she was already a mourner for
 the absence of her Father.
As a testament to her strength,
She survived.
And here she is,
18 years and some months later,
Daddy, maybe someday you’ll
 hear this.
Daddy, maybe someday you’ll
 hear this
Or maybe you’ll admit to your wrongs
 and respond at least
 call me sometime.
I don’t hate you,
I just have been disappointed for
 nearly 2 decades now,
I want to know you
Show me to you and hear about your
good deeds.
‘Cause now more than ever
I need a reason to say “I love you.”
I’ll talk to you later, hopefully soon.
Sincerely, Yalie.

SPOKEN WORD FEATURED ON SPARK (continued)

Myesha

By Emiliano Bourgois-Chacon

My hands are cold,
and when I find her,
they will also be rough.

So when we meet for the second time
she will be able to see
that I worked hard to get there.
I will do one push up today,
fifty by the end of the year,
and finally,
to get the last name on my list,
I will ride a Grayhound bus into Arizona.
Where I lost the girl with braids,
with the pink bike,
with the dog named Malcom,
Myesha
who rode shotgun in her mom's black Corvette,
my hands are moving
They won't keep still
they want this more than I do,
they want my right elbow straightened,
and my right thumb stretched out
so that my hands
can hold the sun above the horizon
the day I set before it.

Indoors,
with the heat on
my hands are numb.
These
are experienced fingers.
These are strained fingers,
these fingers are as invisibly rough
as my apologies are teary-eyed.
Scarred and cultured,
Myesha
I am almost ready to show you my hands now.