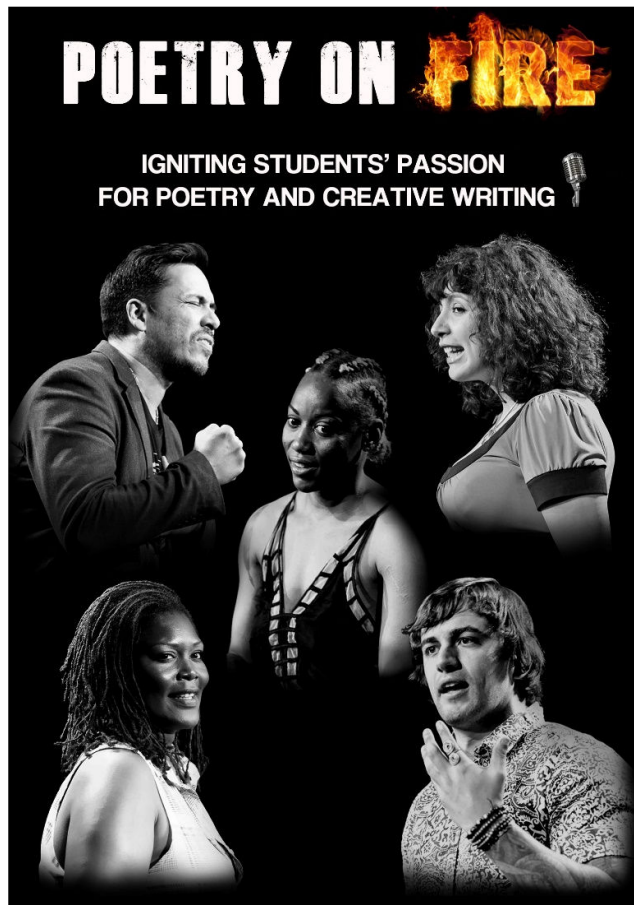


POETRY ON FIRE
IGNITING STUDENTS' PASSION FOR POETRY AND CREATIVE WRITING



31 mins / Color / 2020 / English, Captions, Spanish Subtitles / U.S.



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SYNOPSIS

Students need to understand the power of poetry, the way it can crack issues wide open and start discussions or help a writer address personal problems that can be reflected in a universal way, so they not only help themselves, their poetry may actually help others as well. That's the power of poetry: to give voice to the voiceless, to give power to the pen, and to allow students to write freely. But this takes bravery both from the student writers and from the teachers themselves. When asked about themselves, students absolutely want to write. They want to share their pain and their triumphs. They want to explore emotions, imagery, and word play. They want to write, but they have not been given the tools, the platform, or the permission to write freely. In other words, the fire has not yet been lit, but our hope is that this program will help ignite your students' passion for writing. When students are given the tools and the permission to be poets, the results blow our minds. And once that happens, they might actually want to Shakespeare next.

PROGRAM CREATOR – STATEMENT

As a community college professor of poetry for 20 years, I have led countless writing workshops and teacher trainings for middle school and high school faculty, and the complaint I hear most often is how difficult it is to teach poetry. In fact, many admit to avoiding poetry altogether or quickly skimming the required unit. There are a couple reasons for this. One reason is that students simply get bored with Shakespeare and Donne because the language is archaic and, from a student's point of view, these poems feel impossible to understand. Therefore, it's hard to get students excited about poetry. In addition, another complaint I often hear from English teachers who want to update their reading lists and expose students to newer, more entertaining, culturally and politically relevant, and inspiring poetry is the lack of poetic examples—or at least classroom-friendly examples. It's hard to teach contemporary poetry when your own exposure is limited to the centuries-old Anglo-Saxon literary canon.

In my experience, however, poetry has been a powerful vehicle to get students to open up and speak their truths, to share their worldviews, and to build an unbreakable bond with their peers. It is in this spirit that I wanted to showcase some of the most dynamic and accomplished spoken word poets in the country and ask them to share their advice on writing and performing. Their poems are edgy and authentic, and their voices are contemporary and engaging. In other words, students will tune in and, hopefully, be inspired to write their own poems. In order to facilitate that goal, I have created two distinct activities that have worked very well in many classrooms and writing workshops: (1.) An "Emotion Card Pre-Writing Activity" that quickly and easily demonstrates how a poem needs to "show not tell" and (2.) a "Letter Poem" activity that will lead students toward a longer, more powerful, full-length poem similar to the poems expressed by the professional poets showcased here.

By watching these model poets, the conversation around poetry and its use and purpose will fundamentally change for the better and students' voices will be heard loud and clear, and poetry, I promise, will be less intimidating to teach and a lot more enjoyable (and essential) for students to write.

-- Professor Sam Pierstorff

BIOGRAPHIES

Program Creator Sam Pierstorff received his Master of Fine Arts degree in creative writing from CSU Long Beach and went on to become the youngest Poet Laureate ever appointed in the state of California when he was selected to the position in 2004 by the city of Modesto where he currently teaches English at Modesto Junior College. He is the creator of The Ill List, California's most prestigious annual poetry slam competition, and for more than a decade he has hosted SLaM on RyE, a wildly popular monthly open-mic event. As a performance poet himself, he won UC Merced's Grand Slam championship in April 2013 and the Rogue Festival Poetry Slam in 2014. He has published more than 200 poems in literary journals including Rattle, Clarion Review, Slipstream, and online at The Huffington Post and The Normal School. In 2014, his autobiographical story about growing up Muslim in America was selected as the opening piece in an anthology called Salaam, Love (Beacon Press) and he was subsequently invited to Harvard University to read and perform his work.

In 2015, he was selected as a "Teaching Artist" as part of The Gallo Center for the Arts' "Creativity at the Core" program (supported by the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts). Sam Pierstorff is the founding editor of Quercus Review Press, a small press publisher of poetry books, and his own debut poetry collection, Growing Up in Someone Else's Shoes, was published by World Parade Books in 2010. Most recently, he co-edited More Than Soil, More Than Sky: The Modesto Poets, which launched to #1 on Amazon's Poetry Best Seller list upon its release. He is a recipient of an Award of Merit from the California Association of Teachers of English and a three-time Pushcart Prize nominee. You can follow Professor Pierstorff at @nanjapoet

THE POETS

Danee Black also known as Queen D is a poet, teacher, coach and recently published author. She has been on 4 nationally ranked poetry teams, she is a 2-time Golden State grand slam champion, 2010 Indie Ink Slam champion and was a featured poet on TVOne's Verses and Flow. She is currently sharing her love for writing, art and healing with her own therapeutic coloring journal titled "What's In Your Heart?"

Joyce Lee is a writer, educator, performer, poet and an Oakland, California native whose gift with words and expression have made her an international talent. She has been a performance competitor since the age of eleven. Joyce Lee performed at Yoshi's of San Francisco, Oakland's First Annual Pride Parade, Oakland's Annual Art & Soul Festival, The Ill-list, and San Francisco's Theatre in the Vagina Monologues to fund for Womyn's shelters in Haiti and continues to give bone-chilling performances, making her a favorite featured storyteller for WNYC's Snap Judgement.

Brandon Melendez is a Mexican-American poet from California. He is the author of home/land (Write Bloody 2019). He is a National Poetry Slam finalist and two-time Berkeley Grand Slam Champion. He was awarded 'Best Poem' at the collegiate national poetry competition (CUPSI). His poems are in or forthcoming in Ninth Letter, Muzzle Magazine, the minnesota review, Sixth Finch, and elsewhere. He currently lives in Boston & is an MFA candidate at Emerson College.

Jaz Sufi is a Kundiman fellow, a National Poetry Slam finalist, and the slammaster of the Berkeley Slam, the longest running poetry event on the West Coast. She was a featured poet at the 2011 USF Creative Justice Art Show and has featured at venues across the country, from the Scottish Rites Center to performing alongside the Townsend Opera. Her work has been published or is upcoming in PANK, DIALOGIST, The Offing, The Dead Animal Handbook, and elsewhere.

Joaquin Zihuatanejo, from Dallas, Texas, is an American slam poet and teacher. In 2004, Zihuatanejo competed in the National Poetry Slam as part of the Dallas Poetry Slam team, which placed third. He also appeared on HBO's Def Poetry in 2005. In 2008, he won the Individual World Poetry Slam and was the winner of the World Cup of Poetry Slam in 2009. He is a featured faculty member at the 2018 Conference on Poetry and Teaching at The Frost Place in Franconia, NH. Currently, Zihuatanejo resides near his hometown of Dallas with his wife and two daughters. Outside of poetry, Zihuatanejo taught English and creative writing for seven years. Zihuatanejo regularly visits Middle and High Schools like New Tech High and Coppell High School. One teacher, Danae Boyd says "Zihuatanejo is an inspiration to all of our students. He encourages them and shows them the true beauty of poetry."

PRODUCTION CREDITS

POETS (in order of appearance)

QUEEN D

BRANDON MELENDEZ

JAZ SUFI

JOYCE LEE

JOAQUÍN ZIHUATANEJO

DIRECTED BY JASON JAACKS

WRITTEN BY SAM PIERSTORFF

PRODUCER LARRY RATTNER

CO-PRODUCER SAM PIERSTORFF

EDITOR YON VAN KLINE

COMPOSER SHIE ROZOW

CINEMATOGRAPHY COURTNEY QUIRIN

PRODUCTION SOUND MICHAEL CLIFFORD

VISUAL FX DESIGN EMMANUEL MIRANDA

POST PRODUCTION SOUND AND COLORIST EMMANUEL MIRANDA

PRODUCTION LEGAL ROBERT NAU, ESQ.

PHOTOGRAPHY RUSSELLRENO PHOTOGRAPHY

ARTWORK DESIGN MICHAEL J MANGANO

PROJECT ADVISOR ANDREA NAKAYA

WEBSITE DESIGN MATT WARNICK