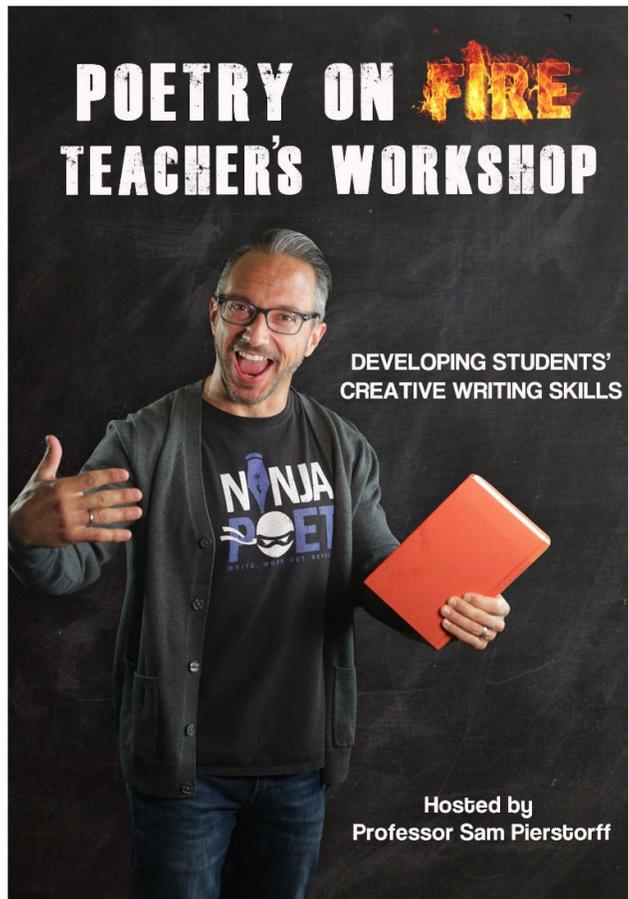


POETRY ON FIRE TEACHER'S WORKSHOP  
DEVELOPING STUDENTS' CREATIVE WRITING SKILLS



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



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## **SYNOPSIS**

Poetry has been a powerful vehicle to get students to open up and speak their truths, to share their world views, and to build an unbreakable bond with their peers. Two activities are presented in this program 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. By integrating these easy-to-use classroom activities, 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 will be less intimidating to teach and a lot more enjoyable and essential for students to write.

## **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 and integrating these easy-to-use classroom activities, 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

## **BIOGRAPHY**

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

## **PRODUCTION CREDITS**

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VISUAL FX DESIGN EMMANUEL MIRANDA  
POST PRODUCTION SOUND AND COLORIST EMMANUEL MIRANDA  
PRODUCTION LEGAL ROBERT NAU, ESQ.  
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PROJECT ADVISOR ANDREA NAKAYA  
WEBSITE DESIGN MATT WARNICK

SLAM POETRY EXCERPTS  
DANEE "QUEEN D" BLACK – "ROADKILL"  
JAZ SUFI – "A LETTER TO SLAM POETRY"