POETRY 2014:
Birth of A Hip-Hop Nation

Study guide contributions by Bryonn Bain and Mahogany L. Browne

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This production pays homage to the roots and contemporary resonance of hip-hop, and features nationally recognized spoken-word artists. Collaborating with musicians and dancers, these poets celebrate the South Bronx-born movement as a universal platform for self-expression, tackling issues on the block and around the world. Students have the opportunity to see a culturally and generationally diverse group of professional artists perform, discovering firsthand that the political is always personal.

*Hip-hop is supposed to uplift and create, to educate people on a larger level and to make a change.*
—Doug E. Fresh

How to Use This Guide

Arts experiences always work best when themes, ideas, and elements from the performance are tied to your curricular plans. At the end of this guide, you will find suggested activities you may implement before or after seeing the production. The overall goals of this guide are to connect to the Common Core State Standards with relevant information and activities; to reinforce and encourage critical thinking and analytical skills; and to provide you with the tools and background information necessary to have an engaging and inspiring experience at BAM.
THE PRODUCTION

ABOUT THE SHOW

Poetry 2014 is a cross-generational interdisciplinary performance featuring diverse, groundbreaking, and professional poets who demonstrate the vitality of the spoken word. It is a theatrical experience—complete with a guest host, musicians, and DJ—unified by a theme relevant to its student audience. For 2014, our theme is “Birth of a Hip-Hop Nation.”

SPOKEN-WORD POETRY

Spoken-word poetry is a contemporary art form fusing elements of verse, music, and theater. Though widely popular throughout the United States in the early 21st century, its roots trace from the protest songs of the Civil Rights Era to the blues and sermonic traditions of the American South, and as far back as the ancient storytelling tradition of African griots. Historical influences notwithstanding, the unprecedented global impact of hip-hop culture, and specifically rap music, has helped to usher in a renaissance of oral poetry which simultaneously defies, embraces, and expands the boundaries of previous poetic movements. Widely referred to as simply ‘spoken word,’ the naming of the form itself stands in contrast to the ‘written word’ in which the verse of the Western literary canon is traditionally composed and experienced by the reader. ‘Performance poetry’ has also been used interchangeably with spoken word poetry. Both terms suggest the meaning of a spoken-word poem is only realized completely when performed or recited. As one pioneering spoken wordsmith of the renowned Nuyorican Poets Café observes, “A performance poem is a poem written to be performed…” Spoken-word poets use the dynamic range of their voice and the subtle nuances of vernacular speech and physical expression as integral elements of their art.

The voice of a black woman is a muted one. I write and perform to alert the wolves of my arrival. My poems were nurtured by Audre Lorde & Lucille Clifton. My poems exist because of Nikki Giovanni & Sonia Sanchez. All of these women were foreign to me before performance poetry armed me with light and a fight for my own life amidst this war against my skin. My kin. I write and recite to save our children. I perform and inform because silence can kill a people. Besides I learned, my voice deafens the wolves.

—Mahogany L. Browne Poet/Curator at the Nuyourican Poets Café
BEST OF BROOKLYN READS 2014 WINNERS

For the first time, students from BAM’s poetry residency, Brooklyn Reads, will perform in this annual main stage show. Through an online voting process two of the over six hundred high school participants will be selected to present their work along side the professional artists in Poetry 2014.

POETRY 2014 POETS

DJ REBORN is a Brooklyn-based DJ who has been moving audiences for more than a decade with her mellifluous blend of soul, hip-hop, reggae, house, Latin, electronic, and Afrobeat. She has spun at shows by artists including The Roots, Common, Talib Kweli, John Legend, and India Arie, and at museums including the Whitney, the Cooper-Hewitt Design Museum, and Brooklyn Museum. DJ Reborn has also spun exclusive events for Maxwell, Metallica, and Lauryn Hill, as well as for visual artists Kara Walker and Wangheci Mutu. DJ Reborn has appeared on BET’s Rap City and served as the 2004–2005 international tour DJ for Russell Simmons’ Def Poetry Jam. She was musical director and DJ for actor/playwright Will Power’s Off-Broadway hit Flow. As a youth mentor and arts educator with Urban Word NYC, DJ Reborn created a workshop for teenage girls that explores DJing, creative writing, and critical analysis of women’s images in media culture.

Will Power is an award-winning playwright and performer. Power’s play Fetch Clay, Make Man recently enjoyed a successful run Off-Broadway at New York Theatre Workshop. Other plays: The Seven (Lucille Lortel Award Best Musical), Five Fingers of Funk! (CTC), Honey Bo and The Goldmine (La Jolla Playhouse) and two critically acclaimed solo shows The Gathering and Flow. Power’s numerous awards include a United States Artist Prudential Fellowship, the TCG Peter Zeisler Memorial Award, a Jury Award for Best Theatre Performance at the HBO US Comedy Arts Festival, and the Trailblazer Award from The National Black Theater Network. Power’s numerous film and television appearances include The Colbert Report (Comedy Central) and Bill Moyers on Faith and Reason (PBS). Power is currently on the faculty at The Meadows School of the Arts/SMU and is the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Playwright in Residence with the Dallas Theatre Center.

Toni Blackman is a world-renowned writer, actress, rapper, and activist. As the first hip-hop artist chosen by the US State Department to serve as an American cultural specialist, she has toured and taught extensively in Africa and Southeast Asia. Blackman has performed with Mos Def, The Roots, Wu Tang Clan, and Erykah Badu, and has been featured as one of Essence magazine’s “30 Women to Watch.” As the founder of the Freestyle Union Cipher workshop, she is considered a leader in the realm of hip-hop education and activism.

Carvens Lissaint is a Haitian American performance artist. Raised on the Upper West Side Harlem, he lives in Washington Heights. Lissaint established himself as a spoken word artist in 2006 and went on to win multiple poetry slams across the country and coach award-winning teams. He made his transition into musical theater in 2007 as a part of the Hip Hopera Theater troupe, working with Edward A. Reynolds West Side High School in collaboration with the Metropolitan Theater Opera Guild. He also debuted his high-energy one-man show Walk (directed and co-developed by Queen God-Is, choreographed by Nicco Anann) at Dance Theater Workshop and Off-Broadway at the 2009 Hip Hop Theater Festival.
Carlos Andrés Gómez is an award-winning poet, actor, and writer from New York City who has performed across four continents. He has starred in HBO’s *Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry Jam* and Spike Lee’s *Inside Man* with Denzel Washington and Jodie Foster. Gómez is the author of *Man Up: Reimagining Modern Manhood*, a Pushcart Prize-nominated book that seeks to challenge the limiting and destructive narrative of machismo that young men are taught. He has lectured and performed at more than 200 colleges and universities, facilitated countless workshops, and delivered numerous keynotes and commencement addresses. He continues to tour the globe.
For more on Carlos or his book, please visit www.Carloslive.com.

Ramya Ramana, 18, is a youth activist, poet, writer, and the current NYC Youth Poet Laureate. Last year, she won the NY Knicks Poetry Scholars program (in partnership with Urban Word NYC) and was awarded a full scholarship to St. John’s University, where she is currently studying Philosophy and Government & Politics. Ramana gives back to her community through various service projects and plans to pursue a career as a community organizer and activist advocating for human rights, social justice, and the power of art.

Pop-Up Poets (PUP) is a New York organization that moves poetry into unconventional public spaces. Profiled in The New York Times, PUP stages surprise poetry readings to celebrate the stories contained within public space, promoting dialogue and community between laundromat customers, grocery shoppers, and rush hour commuters. PUP has developed partnerships with Urban Word NYC and the Juilliard School to execute curriculum around creative writing, performance, and public art.

PUP curators Samantha Thornhill, Jon Sands, Adam Falkner, Syreeta McFadden, and Elana Bell are Brooklyn-based artists and educators with advanced degrees from Columbia University, Sarah Lawrence College, and the University of Virginia. They have received awards, fellowships, and residencies from The Academy of American Poets, The Jerome Foundation, Funds for Teachers, and Hedgebrook. PUP curators have exhibited their works in a range of venues, including the Arts Alive Festival in Johannesburg, HBO, and the 2009 Presidential Inauguration.

Aja Monet became the youngest individual to ever win the Nuyorican Poets Café grand slam in 2007 at age 19, and was part of New York’s first winning team at the Brave New Voices Youth National Poetry slam. She ranked in the top 20 at the National Poetry Slam and fifth in the nation as part of the Nuyorican slam team. In 2008, Aja Monet was on the Hollywood Slam team at Da Poetry Lounge in Los Angeles, CA. She has performed at the NAACP Pre-Inauguration Event for Barack Obama, New York City’s Town Hall, the Apollo Theater, the Nuyorican Poets Café, Bowery Poetry Club, B.B. King, The Schomburg Center of Harlem, and various college campuses, universities, and venues around the United States, Europe, Cuba, and Bermuda. Monet has shared the stage with poets Amiri Baraka, Ntozake Shange, and countless others. www.ajamonet.com
Rebel Diaz is fronted by MC’s Rodstarz and MC/Producer G1. After first performing at an immigrant rights march in New York City in 2006, the bilingual crew has taken the international community by storm with its explosive live shows. With influences ranging from Chicago house to South American folk, Rebel Diaz combines classic boom-bap tradition with hip-hop’s global impact. The group’s versatility has led to sharing the stage with the likes of Common, Mos Def, and Public Enemy, while feeling right at home with acts like Rage Against the Machine and Calle 13. Multiple tours throughout Europe and Latin America have only solidified Rebel Diaz’s international appeal.

The South Bronx-based group has also piqued the interest of the academic community with poignant social commentary and energetic performances. Rebel Diaz has spent the last eight years visiting dozens of colleges and universities, facilitating workshops, speaking on panels, and performing at national conferences, in addition to founding a South Bronx art center for teens and young people, the Rebel Diaz Arts Collective (RDACBX). On the heels of its critically acclaimed Otro Guerrillero mixtape series, and 2011s #Occupy The Airwaves mixtape, Rebel Diaz released a debut album, The Radical Dilemma, in 2013.

Tre G. is a husband, father, poet, and native of Camden, NJ. He has performed at universities, grade schools, and halfway houses across the nation, and was the 2010 Loser Slam Grand Slam Champion. Tre G. was the 2013 Nuyorican Grand Slam Champion and appeared on season 3 of TVOne’s Verses & Flow.

MONICA L. WILLIAMS (director) is a multi-disciplinary theater artist and a graduate of New York University and Wright State University. Williams is the founder and lead cultivator of Creative Legacy Projects. This is her seventh year as director of the BAM Poetry performance. Her off-Broadway theater credits include project producer of Foundry Theatre’s Pins and Needles with FUREE, artist-in-resident at 651 Arts, and director for the national tour of History of the Word. Her work has been presented at the Apollo Theater, the Hip-Hop Theater Festival, the Zipper Factory, Culture Project, and various regional theater companies. She is active in the field of arts and social justice. As the national artistic director for the Kentucky Foundation for Women’s Special Project, she leads a collective of fierce artists who work to strengthen family ties within the criminal justice system. She has partnered with community-based projects in New York, Kentucky, Ohio, and California, and is a 2012 Arts and Culture Fellow at the Rockwood Leadership Institute. Williams is an adjunct lecturer in the African American Studies department at New York City College of Technology and has served as artist-in-residence at various colleges throughout the US. She is a proud associate member of the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers. Twitter: @creativelegacy.

ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY


Overview: An opportunity for students to research and get to know a participating poetry artist beyond the standard biographical information provided.

Objective: Students will learn more biographical facts about a poetry artist and draw connections between the artist and their artistic work.

Assign students a poetry artist from the Poetry 2014 production to research. Have them present their assigned poet to the class and then discuss each of them.

Ideas for Discussion:
- Does the artist represent any particular style or culture?
- If so, how does style and culture inform his/her art?
- What have you learned about the background of the artist?
- How would you describe the poet’s style of presentation?
- Share a portion of a poem from the poet.

CCSS ELA-Literacy.SL. 11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11—12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY

I am from...Poem

Overview: An easy introduction for students to personally express themselves through a spoken-word format.

Objective: Students will create a poem based on personal thoughts and experiences that they can share with a partner or the class.

Create a list of 10—15 personal questions for the students to answer (My favorite food is, my favorite thing to do is, someone who taught me something important is, when I think of my neighborhood I think of, a challenge in my life I overcame was, etc).

After students answer these questions on one side of a page, have them write a list of sentences that each begin with “I am from...” on the other side of the page.

Students can choose any of their personal responses to complete the “I am from...” sentences.

For example:
I am from lasagna and garlic toast.
I am from running around my house.
I am from my mother who taught me to be honest always
I am from the sound of the subway rumbling
I am from learning to read

Have students share their spoken word poems with a partner or with the class.

CCSS.ELA.W.11-12.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1—3 above.)

Poetry Slam

Overview: Transform your classroom into a poetry slam cafe.

Objective: Students will create poems individually or a group and incorporate additional elements like movement or music into their classroom presentation.

A poetry slam is a competitive presentation at which poets read or recite original work.

Create poems to present as a class:
- Decide on a theme for the presentation.
- Create group and individual poems.
- Decide whether to incorporate music or movement into the presentation.
- Decide if you will present for each other or for a different audience.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Community Engagement...Poem

Overview: An introduction for students to express their thoughts and ideas about civil engagement and conflict resolution through creative writing.

Objective: Students will create a poem based on their thoughts and experiences that they can share with the class.

Create a one or two minute spoken word poem about ending conflict and promoting peace (or some other social justice issue). Research topics of interest such as “Stop-and-Frisk,” war or conflict in a specific country, or write about the concept of peace. Perform your spoken word piece for your class.

Example for “Stop-and-Frisk”

Part I.
Create two columns
In one column list locations relative to the topic, i.e., city streets or subway stops.
In column two list active verbs—dare to be different
Example: A rabbit jumping, A crow barking, A lion yawning

Part II.
Use a newspaper headline addressing the social injustice, or refer to your own experience. Use as many details as possible. Rely on your 5 senses: smell, touch, taste, hear & see to color the poem. Even if you have not experience the injustice you are writing about, use the newspaper details to help fill in the scene. Use the two columns as word banks throughout the poem. Creating a concrete jungle of poetic imagery.

CCSS.ELA.W.11-12.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1—3 above.)

History of Hip-Hop

Overview: An opportunity for students to explore hip-hop history and persuasively argue what they feel was its most significant event.

Objective: Students will research hip-hop history, form their own conclusions about a particularly significant event, and state their reasons for this conclusion with supporting evidence, articulated in a critical essay.

In August, 2013 hip-hop turned 40. Read the National Public Radio article “Hip-Hop Turns 40,” and have students write a short essay with supporting examples from the article or external resources on the most significant event in hip-hop’s evolution.

Some topics to cover:
- What were the historical circumstances of the event?
- What do you feel was the most significant event in hip-hop?
- Who were the key players involved?
- How did corporate America affect the evolution of rap/hip-hop?
- From your personal perspective, describe hip-hop as it exists today.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.11-12.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.11-12.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1—3 above.)
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The mission of BAM Education & Humanities is to ignite imagination and ideas through programs that
enrich the audience experience, spark conversation, and generate creative engagement.

BAM Education connects learning with creativity, engaging imagination by encouraging self-expression
through in- and after-school arts education programming, workshops for students and teachers,
school-time performances, and summer arts programs.

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