

**SPOKEN
WORD**

What is spoken word?

Performance poetry; poetry written with the intention of being performed for an audience. It's poetry written from the heart, to move butts, and rock souls.

What does it look like?

Storytelling, romantic confessions, political rants, hip-hop rhythms, searing social commentary, *WHATEVER!*

Why use spoken word with kids?

KIDS HAVE A LOT TO SAY!

KIDS WANT A VOICE!

KIDS WANT TO BE HEARD!

And... audiences want:

- Their brains stimulated
- Their hearts massaged
- Their funny bones tickled

Writing to Engage, Entertain, and Affect Your Audience

- **Write what you know.**
 - Connect to your audience with honesty, specificity and detail – if you've *lived* it, it's likely you can *convey* it in a way they will believe it
 - Exhume your own humanity – those viewpoints, fears, desires, victories, and sorrows that make you uniquely YOU!
 - You can try to be the voice for a generation of squished grasshoppers, but you'd better be speaking from underneath the sole of *the man's* shoe!
 - In other words... If you're from the ghetto, write about it – go for it – but if you're from an average middle-class family, why not write a quatrain or two about *your mother*?

Writing to Engage, Entertain, and Affect Your Audience

- **Show, don't tell.**

- Seeing is believing: use concrete (vs. abstract) language – think about tangible, physical experiences and things
 - *Instead of... “I hate that all there is on TV is news about stuff I don't understand.”*
 - *Try... “Pictured between reruns and what commercials want to sell, explodes another war in some far place that I can't spell.” (Holbrook)*
- Focus on rich imagery: vivid pictures, sounds, actions, smells, or other sensations (think about the five senses)
 - *Instead of... “I can't wait to get out of middle school. I'm tired of being reated like a little kid.”*
 - *Try... “I want to lose the water wings and crawl out of this lagoon – stand upright – on my own two feet – and it want it soon.” (Holbrook)*

Writing to Engage, Entertain, and Affect Your Audience

- **Treat your audience as if they're intelligent.**
 - Assume that they can make sense of what you're trying to say; don't dumb down your work
 - Give them a picture, a scene, a sensation, and let them *infer* how it might feel or what's 'really' going on
- **Don't spend five stanzas pulling the arrow out of the carcass.**
 - Once your poem is written, go over it and edit out pieces that don't *help* your story, tell us something *new* or add to the *feel* or *atmosphere*
 - Nix the *blah, blah, blah*
- **Bookend your piece with lines that grab them.**
 - Effective starters and closers are essential – to hook them in, and leave them wanting more

Writing to Engage, Entertain, and Affect Your Audience

- **Avoid flaccid phrasing!**
 - Get rid of feeble, weak verbs like “is” and “are”
 - Use dynamic verbs with MUSCLE!
 - *Instead of...* “*There were thirteen ghosts in the house.*”
 - *Try...* “*Thirteen ghosts pillaged the house like an L.A. mob.*” (Smith)
- **Write with rhythm.**
 - Patterns, recurring imagery, meter, syntax, and varied line lengths add to the ‘music’ of your voice
 - Avoid predictable / relentless end-rhyme; use cross rhyme, interlaced rhyme, internal rhyme, linked rhyme, and near rhyme.

Performing to Engage, Entertain, and Affect Your Audience

- **Avoid preamble.**
 - Don't lose the audience before you've even started the poem!
- **Get in character.**
 - Who's speaking? (Hey... It's okay if it's not you!)
 - Decide whose point of view we're hearing... and stick to it (unless you're performing a team piece or can use many voices!)
 - Use the poem to manifest itself in you and *play itself* through you

Performing to Engage, Entertain, and Affect Your Audience

- **Practice, practice, practice!**
 - Have a deep understanding of your text... knowing and understanding what you're going to say allows you to turn a boring "poetry reading" into a *PERFORMANCE!*
 - Memorization frees your mind and body to focus on communication, and allows you to be more spontaneous and authentic while performing
- **Establish eye contact.**
 - Let them know that YOU know they're there listening
 - Stop to connect with individual people during your performance, or (for beginners) choose a spot at the back of the room and look at it to keep your focus in one place

Performing to Engage, Entertain, and Affect Your Audience

- **Use your body!**
 - Exaggerate your movements, facial expressions, and other aspects of your performance to communicate your story or message
 - Use stage space; make your audience feel like there's much more than just a single person and a microphone on stage
- **Speak up!**
 - Use volume, tone, emphasis, and enunciation to communicate
 - If they can't hear you, they can't be entertained, challenged or enlightened!

Performing to Engage, Entertain, and Affect Your Audience

- **Breathe – and allow your audience time to breathe too.**
 - What would music sound like without rests? *A cacophony of sounds with no purpose!*
 - Use pauses, breaks, and varied pacing to guide us on your journey at your own pace
- **MOST IMPORTANTLY: Fake it ‘till you make it.**
 - You have no idea what you’re doing up there? *SO WHAT?* As long as your audience can’t tell, you’ll be fine!
 - *90% of communication is non-verbal – and often more revealing than words themselves!*