**Unit**

**Slam Poetry**

**Author**

Scott Savage

**Unit Objective**

Students will consider their own inner thoughts and how they express those things by writing and performing a slam poem.

**Previous Experience**

Students have had some exposure to performing and working with small groups for performances, monologues, and basic script analysis.

This unit was created for an intermediate class that was 85-minutes long.

**Standards**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1 | TH:Cr1.1.II. C. | Use personal experiences and knowledge to develop a character that is believable and authentic in a drama/theatre work. |
| 2 | TH:Cr3.1.II. B | Use research and script analysis to revise physical, vocal, and physiological choices impacting the believability and relevance of a drama/ theatre work. |
| 3 | TH:Pr4.1.II. A. | Discover how unique choices shape believable and sustainable drama/ theatre work. |
| 4 | TH:Pr6.1.II. A. | Present a drama/theatre work using creative processes that shape the production for a specific audience |
| 5 | TH:Re9.1.II. C. | Verify how a drama/theatre work communicates for a specific purpose and audience. |
| 6 | TH:Cn11.1.II. A | Integrate conventions and knowledge from different art forms and other disciplines to develop a cross cultural drama/theatre work. |

**Big Ideas:**

* Performance is Personal.
* Truly connecting with a character requires that we become vulnerable with these characters.
* We use tactics to get what we want. Sometimes these are things layered directly in the text, and sometimes they are things that we need to be able to extract.
* Rehearsal and Revising are the processes that make a good work into a great work -- no matter the present format or condition of the work
* I need to be both mindful of my audience with my art, and a mindful audience member of art.

**Essential Questions (EQ)**

* What does it mean to be vulnerable as a performer?
* What is the process of creating my own written work?
* How do I revise my writing when it is so personal?
* How do I know how to connect with my audience?  
  What makes slam poetry different than any other kind(s) of performance?
* How do I value my own performances?
* What are objectives and tactics, and how can they be achieved when I’m the only person speaking?

**Enduring Understandings (EU)**

* A meaningful performance has a specific audience in mind. While there may be others who benefit from the message of the performance, often, the goal is to say something to a specific group or demographic.
* Each character always has a goal. How they go about achieving that goal is a tactic. Different characters with the same goal may use different tactics, and a single character may also attempt many tactics to achieve their goal.
* Work that is shared is work that can be improved upon. You need to be willing to adapt even the things you like most.
* Being emotionally responsible while maintaining vulnerability as a performer is a difficult balance.
* Emotional responsibility means knowing and understanding your limits of what you can and should talk about in a specific context (in our case, the classroom).
* Being vulnerable as a character means knowing what the character has difficulty revealing, and revealing it to the audience in a way that asks them to support you.
* Each person has their own success criteria. Considering what a successful performance looks like to you should inform your own process of selecting success criteria.

**Key Assessments**

* Writing and Performing of contentless scenes.
* Writing and Revising of Slam Poetry
* Performing and Self-evaluating Slam Poetry
* Transferring written word into physical image or tableau.
* Participation in self-discovery activities.

**Lessons**

**Lesson #1: Objectives and Tactics**

**Objective***:* Students will demonstrate a basic understanding of objectives by participating in activities that require choices to be made.

**Lesson #2: Contentless Objectives and Tactics**

**Objective***:* Students will explore how to achieve an emotional objective through a partner using tactics in contentless scenes.

**Lesson #3: Slam Poetry Centers**

**Objective***:* Students will explore how to achieve an emotional objective through a partner using tactics in contentless scenes.

**Lesson #4: Shaping your Poem**

**Objective***:* Students will use Uta Hagen’s questions and tableaux to develop ideas for their Slam Poems.

**Lesson #5: Revising Your Work**

**Objective***:* Students will use peer feedback to enhance their poems to prepare for their final performances.

**Lesson #6: Setting the Stage**

**Objective***:* Students will collaborate with their peers on how to make sure their audiences are ready for their poems.

**Lesson #7: Slam Poem Performances**

**Objective***:* Students will perform their Slam Poems and evaluate themselves based on the collaborative rubric from the last class.

**Lesson #1: Objectives and Tactics**

**Objective***:*

Students will demonstrate a basic understanding of objectives by participating in activities that require choices to be made.

**EQ:**

*What is an objective? Can I pick any objective for my character?*

*What are tactics? How do I know what tactics my character will use?*

*Do tactics always work? What do I do if I feel like a tactic is failing?*

*What kinds of tactics can I use?*

**EU:**

*Your character wants something -- usually something they have to go through another person to obtain.*

*Your character also has smaller goals along the way. The more of these you can figure out, the clearer your choices are on stage.*

*Tactics are methods or practices your character attempts to get what they want. Some work and some do not, but characters will keep using different tactics until one of 3 things happens*

1. *Their objective is achieved*
2. *They realize their objective is (at least for the moment) unobtainable or unimportant*
3. *Their objective changes.*

*Understanding your character’s background (age, upbringing, socioeconomic status, relationships, etc) as well as their context (where they are, why there are there, who else is there, what is going on in that place) helps inform what kind of tactics a character would choose.*

*Sometimes our tactics include avoiding the things we* ***don’t*** *want.*

**Materials Needed:**

Something the students want.

**Hook:**

In this class, each day the students will see a quote written upon the board. At the start of class, students are to find a group of their classmates to improvise a small performance based on the ideas found within the quote. The groups are given 5-7 minutes to prepare based on the length of the quote and the flow of ideas. Students are then given the opportunity to perform their group scene in front of the class. After each group has performed, the students will take a few minutes to discuss the quote as a lead into our activities for that class period. This is done each class, and the students know what to expect.

The quote for this class is:

“If your enemy is secure at all points, be prepared for him. If he is in superior strength, evade him. If your opponent is temperamental, seek to irritate him. Pretend to be weak, that he may grow arrogant. If he is taking his ease, give him no rest. If his forces are united, separate them. If sovereign and subject are in accord, put division between them. Attack him where he is unprepared, appear where you are not expected .”

― [Sun Tzu](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/1771.Sun_Tzu), [The Art of War](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/3200649)

**Step 1:** *Break it Down --* Ask the students to discuss to picture themselves as people in war (or in something fictitious like *The Hunger Games*). Which of Sun Tzu’s strategies do they think they would have been most likely to try and why? What does that say about them? Do they think they’d be stronger than most? More emotionally in control? Explain that Sun Tzu was giving military tactics, but these are things that we use in our day to day lives all the time. Explain that we’ll come back to that idea and move to the next activity.

**Step 2:**  *Park Bench --* Take a couple of chairs and set them in front of the class so the rest of the students form an audience. Two people will come up at a time person A will be sitting on the bench. Person B has to get person A off the bench. They can do this in any way except by physically touching. Person B only has to leave if they feel that whatever A is doing would make them leave. However if the audience feel that person B should leave but they are refusing to then they can vote them off. They do this by slowly raising their hands in the air. When Person B leaves, a new person comes up and tries to get *that* person off the bench. Keep this activity going until a wide spread of tactics has been seen and tested. If neither the class nor the players make progress in over 2 minutes, go ahead and make the executive decision to move on.

**Step 3:**  *Graffiti Board --* After the game, ask students to go and list all the tactics they could possibly think of to move someone in a game of park bench. Allow them several minutes to write and discuss. Oversee what they write and ask them to be more or less specific as needed. The idea is to help them see a huge spread of ideas for how they could achieve an objective. When everyone is done, have them return to their seats.

**Step 4:** *The Storm of the Century --* Have the students close their eyes and listen to a story. Explain that there was a film that Stephen King helped produce called “The storm of the century” in which a mysterious stranger visits an island town and causes natural disasters while only telling the police chief “ Give me what I want, and I will go away.” But what he wants is one of the children from the town. Ask what you would do in that situation. You’re the leader of the town, you have children yourself and a spouse, and if the storm doesn’t stop your people will die from its effects one way or another. Ask the students to take a moment to think about what they would do in those circumstances. Have the students share with a partner their thoughts. When they have finished have each partnership briefly share their best or their combined idea.

**Step 5:**  *Give them what they want--* Explain that you have something that all of the students want. In my case it was the choice between extra credit and a card that I got from a local restaurant for free fries. The students were to pick an objective and use their single best tactic (that could be inspired by the graffiti board) to seek to obtain their objective. Explain that the decision will be made in the next class period when I have time to think about it.

**Step 6:**  *Bringing in the Closer --* Have the students discuss at the end of class (like the backstage of an episode of *Chopped*) why they think they were or were not successful. If it had been someone other than me, would they have used the same tactic? Why or why not? Explain that in the next class, they’ll get to tie more specific emotive choices to these tactics and objectives.

**Lesson #2: Contentless Objectives and Tactics**

**Objective***:*

Students will explore how to achieve an emotional objective through a partner using tactics in contentless scenes.

**EQ:**

*What does it mean for a scene to be “contentless?”*

*How do we connect actions and feelings?*

*How are our feelings influenced by our relationships?*

*What happens if you try saying the same thing in different ways.*

**EU:**

*The experience of writing something and then trying to say it different ways gives us new information about it.*

*The voice that we hear in our head is not the voice our audience hears.*

*Relationship adds a subtext to a performance that may not otherwise be there.*

**Materials Needed:**

Contentless or Open Scenes <https://www.thoughtco.com/open-scenes-for-acting-practice-3938469>

**Hook:**

The quote for this class is:

“I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

― [Maya Angelou](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/3503.Maya_Angelou)

**Step 1:** *The Vampire Game --* (Augusto Boal). As per Boal’s Instructions:   
“The title of this exercise is slightly alarming – and so is the exercise itself. It goes like this: everyone walks around the room with their eyes closed, their hands covering their elbows in the manner described on p. 115, without touching each other or colliding. The Joker [in this case, the teacher] applies a little squeeze to the neck of one of the participants, who then becomes the first ‘vampire of Strasbourg’ – after a couple of seconds, his arms extend in front of him, he gives a scream of terror, and from this point on he must seek out necks in order to vampirise others.

“The vampire’s scream gives the others a clue as to his whereabouts so that they can try to escape him or whoever vampirised him. The first vampire finds another neck and gives it a little squeeze. The second victim screams with terror in the same fashion, her arms rise in front of her and now there are two vampires, then three, and four, etc. Sometimes one vampire will vampirise another vampire; when this happens, the latter lets out a cry of [relieved] pleasure and drops his arms to his sides, having been returned to normal human status. Of course when participants hear such a cry, it indicates not only that someone has been rehumanised, but also that there is still a vampire beside him. The participants must flee the most vampire-infested areas.”

My only adaptation to this is that it is done in the dark, and sometimes I will add a few other vampires to the group to start out so that the threat is there from the onset. After the game has been played for a while (probably 5-10 minutes) turn the lights back on and have the students sit in a circle.

**Step 2:**  *Reflect --* Ask the students to discuss how they felt during the game and why. Ask them if they knew who got them each time. Ask them if they counted how many times they were gotten and not gotten. Help them bridge this game with the Maya Angelou quote. Ask them if they used tactics and had an objective from the get go. Did their objective change?

**Step 3:**  *Write a contentless or open scene --* Provide the students with a few short examples of contentless scenes. See link above for reference. Have students get with a partner and write their own scene. This portion should take a very short time. The only thing the teacher needs to do as they write is to ensure that the scenes are truly contentless. Explain that they should have no nouns, and as few verbs as possible. Each actor needs only 5 lines, but can have as many as 8-10 if they so desire.

**Step 4:** *Rinse and Repeat --* Students will do the following steps with their partner and contentless scenes three different times with each of the different practices.

1. Students will graffiti write on the board following a prompt (see below).
2. Students will select 3-5 things from the board and begin layering them into their contentless scenes. Their goal is to see how applying different ideas to their contentless scene changes the meaning of it.
3. Students will demonstrate the 2-3 best ideas for their scene to another pair of actors and collaborate on what their best practice is.
4. Students will reform a circle in the class and discuss their findings until each group has finished. The thing they determined was the best will be the choice they stick with for the next part(s) of this process.

The prompts are as follows:

1. Write as many strong emotions as you can think of that you could act as a character. (Students will then apply these to their scenes as laid out in steps 2-3; for example, students could write words like “rage, misery, hunger, lustful, surprised, and hurt” and could take some of those, or words written by other students and begin doing their scene with that as the emotion they play.)
2. Write as many reasons you could feel a strong emotion as you can think of. (Same steps, but examples may include “Lost love, winning a contest, lost job, death, facing a fear, being called by someone you hadn’t seen in years, etc.)
3. Write as many relationships you can have with other people or things as you can think of. (Friend, lost friend, lover, ex, parent, child, teacher/student, robber/victim, doctor/patient, etc.)

**Step 5:**  *Performances --* When the students have returned to the circle the last time, ensure that they have selected an emotion, a reason and a relationship with the help of peers and are ready to perform. When this is certain, have the students perform for one another.

**Step 6:**  *Bringing in the Closer --* Ask the students to discuss what was and wasn’t clear about the scenes their partners performed in. What relationships were clear? What things surprised you? Can you articulate any of the words they said that stood out? What about how this made you feel? Consider the Maya Angelou quote from the beginning of class. Explain to students that they are going to begin writing poems and sharing them with the class.

**Lesson #3: Slam Poetry Centers**

**Objective***:*

Students will explore how to achieve an emotional objective through a partner using tactics in contentless scenes.

**EQ:**

*What does it mean for a scene to be “contentless?”*

*How do we connect actions and feelings?*

*How are our feelings influenced by our relationships?*

*What happens if you try saying the same thing in different ways.*

**EU:**

*The experience of writing something and then trying to say it different ways gives us new information about it.*

*The voice that we hear in our head is not the voice our audience hears.*

*Relationship adds a subtext to a performance that may not otherwise be there.*

**Materials Needed:**

Butcher Paper

Something students can read

Class-appropriate Slam Poems

**Hook:**

The quote for this class is:

“Poetry is the one place where people can speak their original human mind. It is the outlet for people to say in public what is known in private. ”

-- Allen Ginsberg

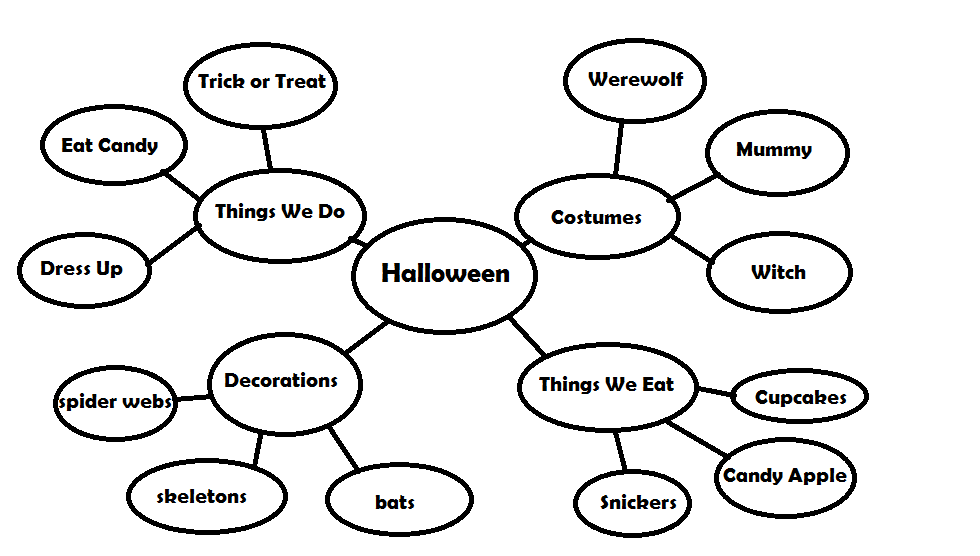
**Step 1:** *“Don’t Get Me Started On!”* -- Explain that each of the students is going to do something that requires them to really let loose on things that they have untapped primal rage about. In other words, they’re going to act really angry (whether that’s pretend or real.) Explain that you’ll demonstrate this first, and ask for students to give you suggestions for things that might make you angry. When one lands with you raise both your hands and say loudly, “Don’t get me started on \_\_\_whatever that thing is\_\_\_” rant about it for 30-60 seconds. Invite a couple of volunteers to come model for the class as well and have them take suggestions for things that might make them angry. If more students want to go than we could do in 5-10 minutes break them into 2 or 3 groups and have them play amongst themselves. When the rage has burned out, or you’re about 20 minutes into class, have the students wrap up and form a circle.

**Step 2:**  *Intro to the Centers --* Ask the students to discuss what it feels like to express what is really in their hearts. Why don’t we do this very often? What are the risks involved? What do we think of people that do this all the time? When is it ok? Explain that Slam Poems are one popular contemporary way in which we express our feelings that don’t get out nearly as often perhaps they could.

Explain that the students are going to participate in a series of activities in this class that will help them think about and engage with slam poetry as an expressive art form. Explain that the students will have to have a peer sign-off on the fact that they have participated in at least 4 of the 6 centers before the end of class. Then walk about the class and demonstrate how each center operates. You will want to create “Task” cards that give written directions to students when they arrive at the center.

Remember to have students ask questions and/or repeat directions back to ensure that they are both listening and engaged. Centers will require them to work independently much of the class and they need to be sure to get things out of each of them. Also ensure that students don’t go to the centers until all have been explained.

1. Center A -- Timelines
   1. Students are to take a large sheet of butcher paper and make a timeline about important events in their life. The caveat is that it cannot be flat. Each event needs to be either a step up or a step down. That means a birthday could be a step up, but failing a class could be a step down; unless it was a bad birthday, or failing that class taught you something that changed your life. It is a personal thing to determine whether each thing is a step up or a step down.
2. Center B -- Watching Slam Poems
   1. On a tablet or laptop have a series of slam poems that your students can watch. Preferably, download them and have the ability to simply shift between them as needed. Google “Slam Poetry Examples” in Videos or search on YouTube for appropriate slam poetry for your students. Have students watch one, and discuss it with the peers there watching with them. I am certain this will be the most popular area, so it may be wise for the teacher to be here to facilitate discussion and help direct students other ways if they linger for more than two videos.
3. Center C -- Free Association Writing
   1. This should be done by the class library or somewhere that has a large quantity of texts the students can engage with. Have students bring a piece of paper and a pen with them to this center. Explain that their job is to flip through texts until a word or passage stands out to them. They are then to write enough to fill at least half a page, and preferably a full page. Not about what they read, just whatever comes into their mind. It can be relatively unrelated to what they read, but the idea is to write about something that you’re feeling or inspired by.
4. Center D -- Stink Pink
   1. This is a center that requires at least two players at all times. Have one person think of two words that rhyme and have the same number of syllables (like black track, stink pink, Sabrina Arena, etc.) Explain that they need to be exact rhymes and not slant rhymes. Then have the students begin coming up with creative descriptions that match their rhyming words but don’t use the words.
      1. For example “Black Track” could be a railway that was painted the darkest color.
      2. “Stink Pink” could be a foul stench the color of a rose.
      3. “Sabrina Arena” could be a place where a teenage witch has to fight to the death.
   2. When one person comes up with the right answer, it is their turn to come up with one. If no one gets in within 60 seconds, reveal the answer and allow another player to try.
5. Center E -- Word Webs
   1. Students in this section will take another piece of paper, and write a strong emotion they feel right now or have felt recently in the center of the page. They are to then begin writing other words that branch off of the other word(s) they’ve already written like a brainstorming cloud. There is no minimum or maximum to what they have to write, as long as they can do other centers as well.



1. Center F -- Rough Drafts
   1. Students cannot start in this center, but if they complete 3 other centers first, they can begin writing slam poems about things that they connect to so that they can begin getting a sense of what they want to write about. The poems don’t need to follow any form, meter or outline (yet) but will eventually be revised by themselves and their peers.

**Step 3:** *Release the Kraken --* Give students the task card/hand out at the bottom of this lesson plan and enable them to work on their own. Explain that they should spend no more than 15 minutes any one place and will need to have a conversation with their peers for the last 5 minutes of class. Spend time when possible side coaching or inviting students to work at centers that appear to be less fruitful or have gotten off track.

**Step 4:**  *Bringing in the Closer --* Ask students to share their thoughts about poetry in general, and then slam poetry. Ask students to share which centers were the most and least useful (and then adapt for future use) and why. Explain to students that they are going to need to be a little bit vulnerable to be successful in this unit.

**Slam Poetry Centers**

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*\*visit each center and follow the directions on the Task Card there; have a peer sign this sheet checking you off as having completed that center appropriately; list the product resulting from each center here or use the space below/on the back of this page or attach it to this page; turn it all in at the end of class\**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Center** | **Peer Name** | **Your Product** |
| **A** |  |  |
| **B** |  |  |
| **C** |  |  |
| **D** |  |  |
| **E** |  |  |
| **F** |  |  |

**Slam Poetry Centers**

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*\*visit each center and follow the directions on the Task Card there; have a peer sign this sheet checking you off as having completed that center appropriately; list the product resulting from each center here or use the space below/on the back of this page or attach it to this page; turn it all in at the end of class\**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Center** | **Peer Name** | **Your Product** |
| **A** |  |  |
| **B** |  |  |
| **C** |  |  |
| **D** |  |  |
| **E** |  |  |
| **F** |  |  |

**Lesson #4: Shaping your Poem**

**Objective***:*

Students will use Uta Hagen’s questions and tableaux to develop ideas for their Slam Poems.

**EQ:**

*What do emotions look like?*

*What is a Tableau? How can what we see physically inspire our words?*

*What tools are in my bag to give my poem power?*

*What does do things like alliteration, simile, and movement have in common with*

*What do Uta Hagen’s first three of her 7 questions teach me about myself as my character?*

**EU:**

*Slam Poetry is about free expression.*

*A Tableau is an image (or series of images) that is used to express an idea or convey a story.*

*You already have so many of the tools. I want your to do better than just one try.*

*Uta Hagen’s first six questions can be reduced to these three: What are about who you are, your circumstances, and what are my relationships? These will tell you what you’re trying to represent about yourself in your poem.*

**Materials Needed:**

Just the quotes

Dance Clips for the beginning with tableaux

**Hook:** *Journal --* In this class, each day the students will see a quote written upon the board. At the start of class, students are to find a group of their classmates to improvise a small performance based on the ideas found within the quote. The groups are given 5-7 minutes to prepare based on the length of the quote and the flow of ideas. Students are then given the opportunity to perform their group scene in front of the class. After each group has performed, the students will take a few minutes to discuss the quote as a lead into our activities for that class period. This is done each class, **but this particular class is different.**

This time, they’re going to do tableaux, so I’m going to walk them through the idea of tableaux first. I’m going to do it by having them do quick tableaux of familiar stories. Then they’ll do the journal just as 3 tableaux in like a museum exercise. I’m also not going to write the tableau on the board, but instead print the quote and give it to small groups individually so that they think they each have a different quote. I may or may not use a couple dance clips to show what I mean about frozen images.

“Painting is poetry that is seen rather than felt, and poetry is painting that is felt rather than seen.”

― [Leonardo da Vinci](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/13560.Leonardo_da_Vinci)

**Step 1:** *Unpacking Tableaux --* Discuss tableau as a way to convey an idea. What can you get from a tableau that you cannot get from words alone? I’ll reveal that all their quotes were the same, and ask them to discuss why we came up with the things we did. What resonated? Why? When the discussion has finished, ask the group to form a circle.

**Step 2:** *Uta Hagen’s 3 Questions →* Have the students go around the circle once saying something they visibly are, and step forward. If other people agree with that thing, then have them step forward as well. Go around the circle a second time, and have the students share something about their circumstances that may or may not be visible (I’m cold, I’m tired, I didn’t eat breakfast), and do the same thing.

Then have the students say a relationship in their life and a quality about the relationship (Father, damaged OR Brother, clinging OR Harambe \*dabs\*) Then talk about if this was comfortable or uncomfortable and why. Discuss again the need to be both vulnerable and emotionally responsible. Have the students as they’re so inspired begin to step forward on their own to talk about things seen or unseen that they plan on discussing in their Slam Poem.

If they don’t know yet, then have them step forward anyway with things they have strong thoughts or feelings about. When the activity has gone on for several minutes, or a good finishing point is reached, stop the activity and have students break out. I’ll then ask the students to break into groups of their own choosing of just 3 people.

**Step 3:**  *Story time and Tableaux --* Explain that each person is to tell a story to their group. The first non-storyteller person is to be a puppet, and the third in the group is to be the puppeteer. As the person tells the story, the puppet master is to make non-literal tableaux out of what they’re hearing from the person’s story. The goal is to get somewhere between 3-5. The puppet master can ask the storyteller questions, but the puppet is to simply respond to physical or verbal cues. Then recreate the story as three separate tableaux. Each person in the group will fill each role at some point, and then when all people have done all parts, we’ll do another museum exercise. Have the students go around the class looking at each other’s tableaux and discussing what they see in the stories.

**Step 4:** *Quiet Writing --* From the end of this activity to the end of class, students are to free write or web about their poems. I’ll play music, and students can sit anywhere in the space, but until the last two minutes of class, they are to simply write.

**Step 5:** *Bringing in the Closer –* When 2 minutes are left in class, have students share what their thoughts were from the class. Impressions, if they feel like they got more inspiration for what to write about. Explain that Uta Hagen wants a person to connect with who a character is first, and that if you understand who *you* are you’ll be more successful at getting to the heart of another character. Explain that a draft is due at the beginning of the next class.

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**Lesson #5: Revising Your Work**

**Objective***:*

Students will use peer feedback to enhance their poems to prepare for their final performances.

**EQ:**

*What is the process of revision like?   
Does revision mean my work is bad?*

*What are tools that I can use to make my poetry even better?*

**EU:**

*It is important to not lose sight of the fact that revision and rehearsal are always part of the process of creating good art.*

*Poetry tools can be applied to even good parts of a poem to make them more lifelike.*

*We learn best from when we share what we have.*

**Materials Needed:**

Poetry Packet <http://www.chaparralpoets.org/devices.pdf>

Nametags

**Hook:** *Journal --* In this class, each day the students will see a quote written upon the board. At the start of class, students are to find a group of their classmates to improvise a small performance based on the ideas found within the quote. The groups are given 5-7 minutes to prepare based on the length of the quote and the flow of ideas. Students are then given the opportunity to perform their group scene in front of the class. After each group has performed, the students will take a few minutes to discuss the quote as a lead into our activities for that class period. This is done each class, **but this particular class will echo the previous lesson.**

This time, they’re going to do 3 tableaux in like a museum exercise. When each one happens, ask for volunteers to reshape something within the tableau and discuss how the change has an effect upon the meaning in the tableau. This means the tableaux will be done twice. Once with no changes and once again through with classmates making changes.

“There is nothing noble in being superior to your fellow man; true nobility is being superior to your former self.”

― [Ernest Hemingway](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/1455.Ernest_Hemingway)

**Step 1:** *Revision --* Have the students discuss what it was like having their tableaux changed. Did anyone prefer the changes that were made? Was it uncomfortable changing someone else’s work? What’s the difference between revising their journal tableau and revising something more personal to you? What qualifications do you need to have to give feedback on something like this? Explain that while feedback is valuable, it is not law. Discuss “The Brain Trust” from Ed Catmull’s book “Creativity Inc.” and how directors are instructed to listen, but not to do what is told to them.

**Step 2:** *Positive Candor --* Ask the students to form a circle. Ask them to look around the circle and think of positive things about themselves. Explain that being honest is not the same as bragging. Ask each student in the circle to say something positive about themselves. When each person has gone, ask the students how they felt about this. Was it tough? Why or why not?

Go around again and ask them to be candid, or vulnerable about something they think about themselves. It can be positive or negative, but something they think is pretty straight forward. When each person steps forward and says the thing, ask if anyone in the circle feels the same about that person or might have a different perspective. This should be largely affirming as students may say things like “I think I’m awkward” or “I have a weird face” and other students would seek to “revise” their train of thought in honest ways. If needed, intervene in positive ways. At the end of the circle, explain that even though we are the most aware of ourselves or our work, sometimes other people have perspectives that can help us reinforce what we think about ourselves.

**Step 3:** *Becoming the expert --* Hand out the poetry packets to each student. Ask them to take a few minutes and silently look through the topics that they feel most familiar with. After a few minutes when the students have found things that they are comfortable with, ask them to find or create a few short examples of this as their “body of evidence” that they are indeed experts. Experts should be able to ideally both recognize and reproduce certain things. Have them share their “body of evidence” with peers and ask each student to both share and verify that another person is a relative “expert” on that subject. When this has happened, hand out the nametags and have them write the thing(s) that they are experts in on the name tags so we can seek to ask questions of them as we enter the revising process.

**Step 4:**  *Poetry Sharing and Revising --* \*\*\*Initially, this was going to be done in small groups, but with the nature of my class being small and not having handed in many drafts, we did it together as a class. I feel this worked better and will do it this way in the future unless I have a very large class, the biggest adaptation would be that students become experts of multiple things in small groups and students share selections of their own work for revision rather than me sharing pieces as you’ll see\*\*\*

Take copies of all of the texts that you have been given by students. Find snippets of the poems that are interesting but not deeply revealing. Read these snippets aloud to the class (or if planning ahead, perhaps project them). **DO NOT** reveal who the student is that you’re drawing from. Ask students first to share what they feel positively about in terms of the piece. Then ask them what they feel would be interesting to try revising, or things that they noticed as things to amend.

Write these things on the board in a visual way. Then ask the experts to share ideas for how they can reinforce or revise portions of what is read. Have 3-6 experts share on each poem and ensure that all students are participating by both accepting volunteers with feedback and asking for specific skill sets to try with the poems. Doing this should take 4-8 minutes per poem depending on how much the students have to say about these things. Doing this for 5-8 poems should be more than sufficient, but be sure to seek out a myriad of tactics and feedback about poems.

**Step 5 :** *Bringing in the Closer –* When students have finished engaging in this process, or there are 10 minutes left in class, enable the students to go back and ask “experts” in the class for feedback about specific excerpts of their poems. Side coach and help students to stay on-task thinking about improving their performances.

**Lesson #6: Setting the Stage**

**Objective***:*

Students will collaborate with their peers on how to make sure their audiences are ready for their poems.

**EQ:**

*How can I marry the ideas of Objectives and Tactics with Slam Poetry?*

*What does a successful slam poem performance look like?*

*What makes a good performance feel unsuccessful and vice versa?*

*How can I ensure my audience is ready for my performance?*

**EU:**

*I know what I want to be evaluated on and how.*

*There is a difference in being evaluated by myself, by my peers and by an authority figure.*

*Having clear expectations removes some of the burden of trying to perform for an audience.*

*There are many ways to create a safe space. Some involve preparing my audience and some involve preparing myself.*

**Materials Needed:**

Quotes about learning, value, assessment and so forth (some examples at the end of the lesson plan).

Masking Tape

**Hook:**Students will have several quotes projected for them and will be asked to pick a partner, discuss the quotes, and pick the one they like the most. They will then try to convince another partnership that their quote is best and each set of four will have to settle on the best quote they can find. That should leave 5 quotes in total (at most) for the students to think about in the context of valuing their slam poems. Leave these quotes on the board as a baseline for what they think about learning.

**Step 1:** *Tape Line --* Have a large strip of masking tape down on the floor, and do the masking tape game from “Freedom Writers.” The way it works is that the students stand on either side of the classroom and are asked questions yes or no questions. If they feel like they would answer the question with a “yes” they step up to the line, and then step away for the next question. Begin asking students fairly benign questions about life in general. “Are you tired? Are you having a good day? Are you pleased with your work on your slam poem?” Follow up with these questions as needed.

As students start responding, ask questions about school and their feelings about the way they learn and how they feel about school. Then focus specifically on the kinds of questions that will help them think about their poems. “Do you know what you want your audience to get out of your poem? Do you feel like you’ll be proud of your work? Are you nervous to share? Will it make you vulnerable?” Don’t be afraid to follow up with questions like “is anyone willing to share why they do/don’t feel this way?”

Show the students the clip about poetry from “Dead Poets Society” where he creates the graph about the “greatness of poems” and calls it “excrement.” When the scene ends, have the students gather in a circle and ask their thoughts about it as they gather.

**Step 2:**  *Making the Rubric --* For this portion, you’ll need either a laptop or some kind of writing stuff so that you can take notes and create a rubric that the class is happy with.

Hand out template rubrics about poetry, acting, or other performances that you find online, as well as the template rubric for this class. Ask the student to study the rubrics and share what they think are the most and least valuable things. Encourage them to write on them and say what they think is clear or unclear. Then ask the students to share the things they think are most applicable to their poems. Explain that for this portion, there are some things that you feel the students need to be evaluated on, and others that are negotiable. The list of things that may be mandatory could include things such as:

* Use of Poetic Techniques
* Projection/Diction
* Vulnerability
* Audience in mind

Things that could be viewed as negotiable would depend on what your class liked or didn’t like, but may include things like:

* Use of clear objective/tactics work
* Memorization
* Physical choices in relation to the poem
* Being a good audience member

Have the students come up with both criteria they want to be evaluated on as well as a scale they deem appropriate. It may be appropriate to have the students do this in small groups and present ideas to the whole class

**Step 3:**  *Safe Spaces --* Explain that due to the open nature of slam poetry, it is important for both the performer and the audience to feel like they are prepared for what is to come. Have the students share ideas about how to make the performers and audience members feel like they are in a safe space. I did a few things that helped this to be pretty effective.

1. I would ask some questions of the group with eyes closed and heads down such as:
   1. Do you have a problem with your peers cursing?
   2. Do you feel the need to curse in your poem?
   3. Do you worry about the content you will share?
   4. Do you worry about the content you will hear?
2. I gave the students the floor to respond to respond to one another’s criticisms and concerns. They carried on a 10 minute discussion with precious little intervention by me.

Come up with a code of conduct for what a performer should do if they’re nervous and what an audience member should do if they feel uncomfortable during a performance (or beforehand).

**Step 4 :** *Bringing in the Closer –* At the end of the class, do something light hearted. Play an improv game. Ask the students to tell jokes. The class will have been pretty heavy up to this point. This might even be useful as like a step 2.5 to break it up.

In my class, we played a game called “Madam Zelda” It works like this:

One player leaves the room. Audience provides 3 things that will happen to them in the future, each one more ridiculous than the last. In the game the player that is 'Madam Zelda:Fortune teller' needs to guess the three fortunes. The host, who will be playing their "customer," will be coming in to ask their fortune. The other player's "spirits" will help out by miming the events, in order, behind the "customer’s" back. When all fortunes are guessed the scene ends.

**Assessment/Supplements:**

I’ve included my class’ final rubric as an example.

**Poet’s Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Title of Poem \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Criteria** | **X(+5)/10** | **Notes** |
| Was there a clear objective? | **/** |  |
| Did I see at least 3 tactics used? | **/** |  |
| Was there specific audience in mind? | **/** |  |
| Was the Poem Memorized? | **/** |  |
| Did the person’s physical choices contribute to the piece? | **/** |  |
| Were there at least 6 instances of poetic technique? | **/** |  |
| Was this poem/poet vulnerable? | **/** |  |
| Did the poem take enough time to engage me? | **/** |  |
| Do I understand the inner workings of this character better because of this piece? | **/** |  |
| Was I a good Audience Member? | **/** |  |

**Lesson #7: Slam Poem Performances**

**Objective***:*

Students will perform their Slam Poems and evaluate themselves based on the collaborative rubric from the last class.

**EQ:**

*Did I meet my success criteria?*

*How did I feel at the end of class?*

*What does this have to theater and how are we going to build on this?*

*Do I know how to express to others how I felt about their poems?*

*Do I know how this landed with my audience?*

**EU:**

*It’s ok to follow your impulses when you respond to each poem.*

*This performance was about exploration of self. We’re going to transition to exploration of yourself through other characters.*

**Materials Needed:**

Pre-made “Poll everywhere” [or similar] that enables students to respond to what they thought about the performances; Class Rubric/Evaluation sheet (example included in lesson 6)

**Hook:**In lieu of a Journal for this class, the students will write a line from their poems on the board as a graffiti board. Students will then be instructed to take a few minutes and create or share some kind of art that resonates with one of the lines from one of the poems. That could be a short drawing, a few short lines of their own writing, a bit of a song, a meme, a film clip, a tableau, etc. The idea is to think about the art that they are going to engage with.

Students will then get in small groups and share them rather than sharing with the class on the whole.

**Step 1:** *Sign-up --* Students will write a sign-up list on the board in the order that they would like to go. When the list is up, if anyone is unhappy, they can offer to trade with another student, but if not, the students will simply go.

**Step 2:**  *Performance --* Students are to introduce their piece which should include the following

* Their Name
* The title of the piece
* Any potential warnings for language or content

Students will then share their piece, and when students end the next student goes. Discussion will be saved for the end.

**Step 3:** *Poll everywhere --* Students will share their initial thoughts on “poll everywhere” to the students’ performances. This will enable people to say things that they may be uncomfortable otherwise saying. Students who don’t have phones can use the teacher’s phone. Students while this is going on in will be invited to ask how they would like to share their responses to one another. (This involved lots of hugging in my class.)

**Step 4 :** *Bringing in the Closer –* Express to the students how important it is to be able to open up. Theatre requires students to go places they may not initially want to go, but can have fruitful results like this.