

**SLAMNATION**  
THE SPORT OF SPOKEN WORD

Teaching Resources

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# Unit Planning Organizer for Slam Nation

Core Works	Word & Language Study	Reading & Thinking Strategies	Literary Analysis	Writing	Research	Connections & Extensions	Assessment
Slam Nation DVD Choose poetry from literature anthology to use as comparisons Choose poems from Internet to use as comparisons	alliteration imagery metaphor rhyme rhythm simile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>making predictions using the Slam Scavenger hunt</li> <li>making comparisons using the Y-Chart organizer</li> <li>supporting an opinion with details from the text using the study guide questions</li> </ul>	<p>Theme: examine the theme(s) of a traditional poem and compare/contrast it with the theme(s) found in a SLAM poem</p> <p>Use the Y chart organizer to scaffold discussion and writing about theme</p>	<p>Write a poem imitating the style of one of the SLAM poets featured.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a found poem from the USA Today article, "Poetry to the people: I slam, therefore I am"</li> <li>Begin by free writing on the prompt: "If I Had the Money I would..." craft a poem like Beau Sia's</li> <li>Write a poem for several voices modeled after the Providence piece "A Letter for All Seasons"</li> </ol>	<p>Use the Slam Scavenger hunt to do basic Internet research.</p> <p>Use the Slam Nation web site to do research on the poets featured in the film.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Connect SLAM Nation to the reading and study of a poetic novel such <i>Bronx Masquerade</i> by Nikki Grimes</li> <li>Have students investigate the oral tradition, Aristotle's poetics or other origins of poetry and connect them to the SLAM form</li> <li>Have students create their own poetry chapbooks or "zines" to distribute in the community or at the school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have students write and perform their own poetry</li> <li>organize a classroom or school wide Poetry Slam</li> </ul>

## Poetry to the people: I slam, therefore I am

By Christina Jeng, USA TODAY

Nineteen-year-old Marc Kelly Smith was in love, passionately in love, with Sandy, an English major who liked poetry. So Smith, an aspiring architect, decided he'd give poetry a shot.

Ultimately, Smith got the girl and then got divorced, but never lost his love for poetry. He jokingly remarks that the divorce resulted from the lack of love poems dedicated to Sandy.

Smith's undying love for poetry gave birth to what is now known as Slam Poetry or spoken word — the competitive art of performance poetry — of which Smith, 54, is the beloved father and "Slampapi."

Smith recalls that he was tired of going to passionless poetry readings controlled by English professors who made it hard for those outside of academia to take part. "It was dumb, it was snobbish, it was dead," Smith says. He wondered: If poetry is a passionate art form, why is it dead?

In 1986, he started the Uptown Poetry Slam at the Green Mill, a Chicago jazz club Al Capone once frequented. Poets competed against one another by presenting original pieces complemented by props, costumes or music. Typically, the audience judged the performances with cheers or jeers.

Smith says he chose the term "slam" because it bore a positive and negative connotation. Like baseball, you could hit a grand slam and rock the house. Or you could get slammed if you were bad.

"There have been people who cried; there have been people who got (angry)," Smith says.

Smith's vision has evolved into a renewed interest in poetry and its live performance throughout the nation. The 2004 National Poetry Slam is underway in St. Louis, where poets are performing through Sunday. In this annual tournament, four-person teams from North America and Europe compete for the national title.

Also this month, Smith's *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Slam Poetry* (Alpha Books, \$25) has been published. In it he divulges some of the "tricks" he learned about being a good performer.

To avoid heckles, Smith advises: Don't overstay your welcome; audiences don't like slammers who are "pompous, pretentious, and full of (it)."

# How To . . . Write a Found Poem

1. Choose an article, poem, or short piece of text.
2. Scramble the words in the text and enlarge the font size.
3. Give scrambled words to students with scissors, glue, and blank paper.
4. Encourage students to cut out words and arrange them on the blank paper in “magnetic poetry” fashion. Set some basic rules (i.e.: your poem must be 5 lines long and it must make sense).
5. Once poems are glued down to page, have student decorate or illustrate their work
6. Publish poems by posting them in the classroom or around school!

Example from “Poetry to the people: I slam, therefore I am”

He got the girl  
then got divorced,  
but never lost his love.

He jokes  
that divorce  
lacks love --  
it's a passionless competitive art,  
dumb, dead,  
a welcome overstayed.

He got the girl  
then got divorced  
but never lost his love.

# How To Use the . . . Poetry Slam Scavenger Hunt

## **Objectives:**

- To assess and build background knowledge
- To build motivation to view Slam Nation
- To build motivation and interest to read and write poetry

## **Options**

Use the Poetry Slam Scavenger Hunt worksheet as a pre-viewing activity to assess and build students' background knowledge, use it to guide the viewing of the film, or use it as an after-viewing assessment.

### **As a pre-viewing activity:**

1. Read Aloud:
2. Give students access to the Internet or to several printed resources about slam poetry
3. Handout the Slam Nation Web Resources handout
4. Ask students to complete the scavenger hunt individually or in pairs using the web resources
5. Share what students found with the whole class
6. Connect to further study

### **As a during-viewing activity:**

1. Read Aloud
2. Give students the Poetry Slam Scavenger Hunt handout
3. Direct students to complete the handout as they watch *Slam Nation*
4. Consider pausing the film in select spots to write on scavenger hunt and discuss
5. Allow time at the end of the film for students to share their answers
6. Connect to further study

### **As a post-viewing activity:**

1. Read Aloud
2. Give students the Poetry Slam Scavenger Hunt handout
3. Direct students to complete the handout based on what they recall from the film
4. Allow time for students to share their answers
5. Connect to further study

# Poetry slam Scavenger Hunt

Name

Date

What is slam poetry?

Describe one famous slam poet?

How is slam poetry different from traditional poetry taught in high school?

What surprises you about slam poetry?

Describe the rules of slam.

What are some questions you still have about slam poetry?

# Slam Nation Web Resources

## SLAMNATION

THE SPORT OF SPOKEN WORD



<http://www.slamnation.com/index.htm>  
Visit the poets' pages for links to audio files of their poems!

### Poetry Slam, Incorporated

<http://www.poetryslam.com/>

Read the SLAM FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) to find answers to questions such as: What is a poetry slam? Who gets to participate? What are the rules? Concise and informative PSI's web site is a great starting place for investigating the spoken word.

### Poetry Slam Founder: Marc Kelly Smith (so what!)

<http://www.slampapi.com/default.htm>

Well put together, this site offers a biography of Marc Smith as well as several of his poems in text and video clip formats. From the site: "Marc Smith has brought to the poetry community a new style of presentation, which has given birth to a literary movement. As stated in the PBS television series, The United States of Poetry, a 'strand of new poetry began at Chicago's Green Mill Tavern in 1987 when Marc Smith found a home for the Poetry Slam.'"



### An Incomplete History of Slam

<http://www.e-poets.net/library/slam/>

Written by Kurt Heintz, this site traces Slam from its beginnings in Chicago and New York to its spread nation wide. Interesting. How does the academy view slam? Read this site to gain insight into this and other tensions within the Slam movement.



### Poetry Magic

<http://www.poetrymagic.co.uk/performing.html>

From "what is poetry?" to the writing cycle and more, check out this site for extensive explanations of things such as traditional poetry, modernist poetry, postmodernist poetry, experimental poetry and even poetic writing techniques. The site is organized into sections (Beginngers, Advanced, Professional) and offers everything from simple definitions to literary criticism. Though the pages are word dense, the information is rich and well worth a read.

***Slam Nation***  
**Study Guide Questions**

1. What is slam poetry?
2. From where does the tradition of Slam Poetry come?
3. How is a Slam competition like a “representative democracy”?
4. What are the rules of Slam?
5. How are the poems judged?
6. Describe Marc Smith’s role in the Slam community.
7. What role(s) did the teams from Boston, Chicago, and New York play in the early days of Slam?
8. How is the New York Slam team different from other Slam teams?
10. How is Slam poetry different from traditional poetry taught in schools. Use examples from the film in your response.
11. Who is the audience for Slam? How do the language and or themes of Slam appeal to audiences?
12. How does Slam poetry give marginalized people or groups a voice? Use examples from the film in your response.
13. How does the publishing world view Slam poetry? Do you think that view is justified? Why or why not?
14. What poetic techniques did you notice the poets using? Describe how one technique was used.
15. Do you think it is fair for one poet to use words from another poet’s poems? Why or why not?
16. Which team would you have picked to win the finals and why?

What questions do you have after watching *Slam Nation*?

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# Take a Closer Look... Analyzing the Slam

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

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Poet or Team	Poem Performed	What is the poem about?	How was the poem performed?	Noteworthy... What do you notice?

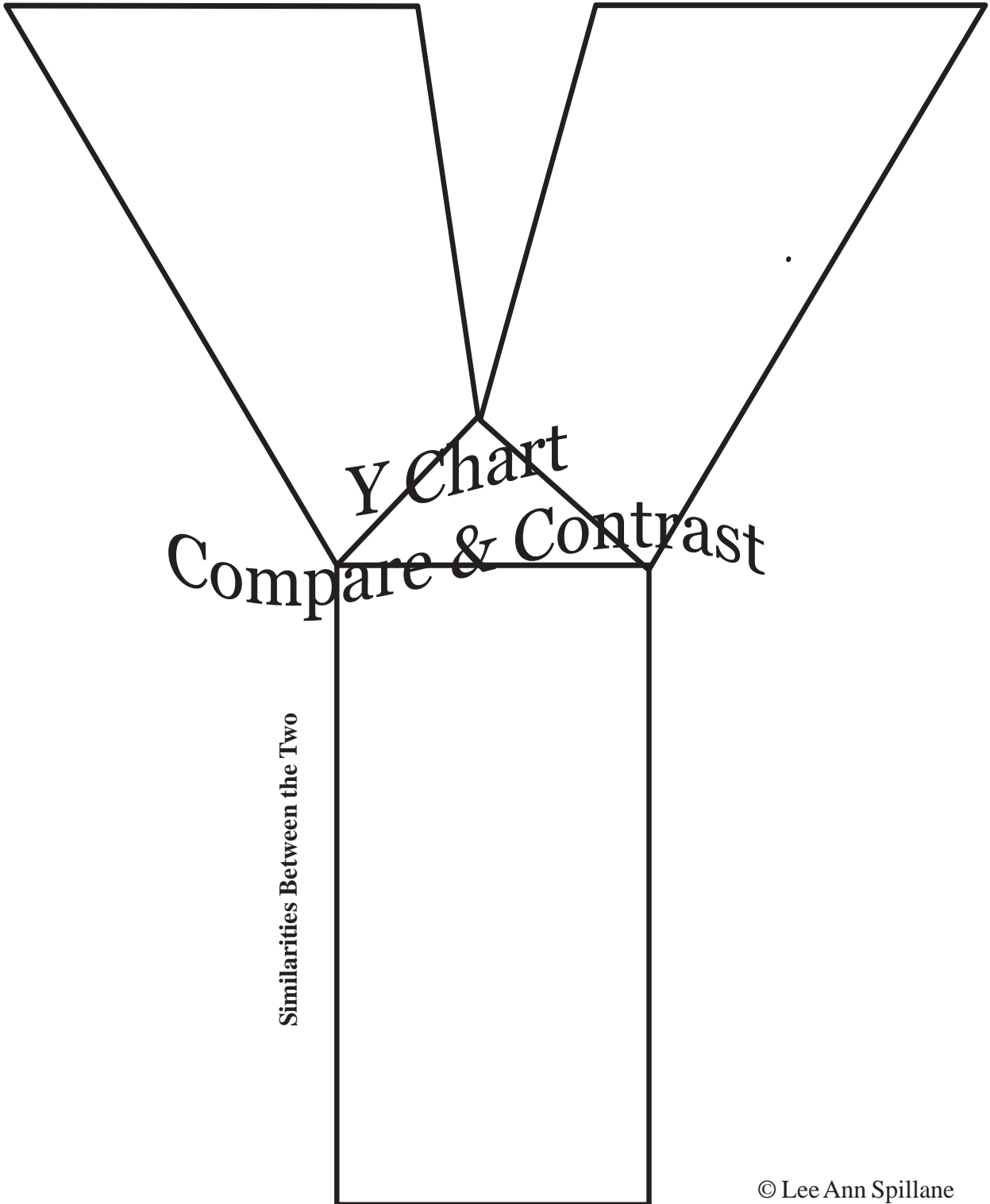
Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** List characteristics and or themes of the two poems chosen in each upper portion of the Y chart. Move similarities down into the base of the Y and leave the differences at the top. Use this organizer to start your thinking for a comparison-contrast essay.

**Slam Poem :** \_\_\_\_\_

**Traditional Poem:** \_\_\_\_\_



# How To . . . Scaffolding Students' Poetry Writing

- **Use Read Aloud**

Read poetry aloud to students. Consider reading one to three poems aloud during various stages of your lesson. Could you use read aloud as a transition between parts of your lesson?

- **Use Shared Reading**

Create an overhead or power point slide of each poem you choose to read and share with the class. To extend the reading have students try writing their own poems modeled after the poem you share.

- **Demonstrate “how to” get started writing a poem**

A simple method that has worked in many classrooms is to begin by choosing a topic and free writing about it. Students then pull words and phrases from the free writing to construct their poem.

School works well as an initial topic students have a lot of personal experience to pull from. Free write on the topic for three minutes. Use a high-lighter to highlight interesting or vivid words or phrases from the free writing. Arrange the words and or phrases into a poem--students should feel free to add words as needed. Other topics that have worked: I love..., I remember when..., My favorite place is . . . The important thing is ... (use *The Important Book*) as a read aloud with this prompt). Always model the process for your students on the overhead before you ask them to do it themselves.

- **Create “Found Poems” from a variety of text**

- **Study and write poetic forms such as Haiku or Tanka**

Read aloud some Haiku or Tanka poetry. Discuss the form. Tell students they will write their own haiku or tanka by focusing on imagery. Define imagery as language that appeals to the senses. Discuss the five senses and use the Five Senses Graphic Organizer to get students to brainstorm vivid language for each of the senses (students love to do this outside on a nice day!). Once they've generated a word bank, have them return to the classroom (or not) to write their own haiku or tanka

- **Imitate your favorites!**

Write your own version of a favorite classic. Create a poem-template by removing key words or images. Keep the refrain, the beginning line or the ending line. Have students “fill in” the template to create their own version of an old favorite.

# How To . . . Organize a Poetry Slam

## **Adminis-trivia to Consider:**

### Audience size

Who will you invite? parents? teachers? administrators? full classes? How large a space will you need?

### Location

Classroom? Auditorium? Gymnasium? Off Campus location? Local Book store?

### Invitations

Student created? Computer generated?

Invite school board members, news media, PTA, local poets, and educational stake holders

### Rules

Establish your own or use the following:

Must be original work

Performed without props or costumes

Individual or group performances

Performed in 3 minutes or less

### Judges

Create a scoring guide (rubric) for the judges to read over prior to the competition.

Create a Slam Score Sheet

Create pre-printed score cards for simplified scoring (1-10) or give judges blank card stock and black markers and allow them to write in their scores

## **Classroom Considerations:**

- Plan SLAM as the culminating event to a unit on poetry
- Scaffold students' poetry writing.
- Read poetry daily
- Write poetry daily
- Form SLAM teams
- Begin weekly "open mike" sessions one month prior to the actual Slam.
- Allow students to volunteer for "open mike" performances; give extra credit for these performances
- Create poetry portfolios (chapbooks, student published collections) to sell or give away on the day of the SLAM

There are several complete books that can guide you through the Slam planning process. For more information check out Michael Baldwin's , *Slam Poetry Manual*, or Gary Glazner's, *Poetry Slam: The Competitive Art of Performance Poetry* .

# Slam Score Sheet

Poet/Team	Judge 1	Judge 2	Judge 3	Judge 4	Judge 5	Subtotal	Subtract High/ Low	Subtract Penalties	Final Score

# Slam Scoring Guide

Slam is typically scored by judges picked at random from the audience. No criteria is set before the slam and the audience scores poems based on their overall appeal.

If you would like to set criteria with the student poets before the competition consider doing so collaboratively. Some criteria you might consider are: imagery (sensory images, vivid language, vivid pictures, intense emotion, etc) , theme, performance style (memorization, dramatics, gestures, etc) , speaking skills (eye contact, voice, etc). Simplify the process by choosing three criteria. Once you decide on your criteria have students define each what criteria would look/sound like at each score point.

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Superior 10-9</b>	<b>Excellent 8-7</b>	<b>Good 4-6</b>	<b>Needs Work 1-3</b>

# Extending the School Slam

- **Have students reflect on the slam experience; ask them to write what worked, what didn't work, and what they would do differently next time**
- **Form a Slam Club**
- **Get involved with Youth Speaks**
- **Organize an "Open Mike Night" for teens at a local book store or coffee shop**
- **Organize local teen slam competitions**
- **Compete a local slams**
- **Submit poetry for publication online to Poetic License**

**Youth Speaks**

<http://www.youthspeaks.org>



**Poetic License: Youth Voice**

<http://www.itvs.org/poeticlicense/youth.html>



<http://www.youthspeaks.org/FlashSite/bnv2004/>

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