A Teacher’s Guide to

“Mayhem Poets”
Introduction

Dear Educator,

As you make plans for your students to attend a presentation of the Arts for Youth program at Lancaster Performing Arts Center, we invite you to prepare your students by using this guide to assure that from beginning to end, the experience is an educationally enriching and memorable one.

The material in this guide is for you. We believe that an understanding of some basic vocabulary and background information on the performance art form will help to prepare your students to better understand and enjoy what they are about to see. We also encourage you to discuss important aspects of the artistic experience, including audience etiquette.

We hope that your students find their imagination comes alive as lights shine, curtains open, and applause rings through Lancaster Performing Arts Center. Just as importantly, we hope that this Curriculum Guide helps you to bring the arts alive in your classroom.

Thank you for helping us to make a difference in the lives of our children.

Arts for Youth Program
Lancaster Performing Arts Center, City of Lancaster

What’s Inside:

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................................................2
What’s Inside: ........................................................................................................................................................................2
Overview of the California Content Standards for Public Schools .........................................................................................3
Theatre Etiquette ......................................................................................................................................................................4
Be a Theatre Critic.................................................................................................................................................................5
What’s Important to Know?.....................................................................................................................................................6
Summary .................................................................................................................................................................................8
Poetry Games.......................................................................................................................................................................9
Play Your Part......................................................................................................................................................................11
Words to Know ................................................................................................................................................................12
Suggestions for Discussion.....................................................................................................................................................13
Poetry in the Neighborhood, Arts in the Economy..................................................
Overview of the California Content Standards for Public Schools

California Content Standards easily applied in your classroom for ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS, READING:

**GRADE 5 Listening and Speaking: Speaking Applications (Genres and their characteristics)**
2.4 Deliver oral responses to literature: a. Summarize significant events and details. b. Articulate an understanding of several ideas or images communicated by the literary work. c. Use examples or textual evidence from the work to support conclusions.

**GRADE 6 Literary Response and Analysis: Narrative Analysis of Grade-Level-Appropriate Text**
3.4 Define how tone or meaning is conveyed in poetry through word choice, figurative language, sentence structure, line length, punctuation, rhythm, repetition, and rhyme.

**GRADE 7 Word Analyses, Fluency, and Systematic Vocabulary Development: Vocabulary and Concept Dev.**
1.1 Identify idioms, analogies, metaphors, and similes in prose and poetry.

**GRADES 11-12 Literary Response and Analysis: Structural Features of Literature**
3.1 Analyze characteristics of subgenres (e.g., satire, parody, allegory, pastoral) that are used in poetry, prose, plays, novels, short stories, essays, and other basic genres.

**GRADES 9-10 Listening and speaking: Speaking Applications (Genres and their characteristics)**
2.4 Deliver oral responses to literature: c. Demonstrate awareness of the author’s use of stylistic devices and an appreciation of the effects created. d. Identify and assess the impact of perceived ambiguities, nuances, and complexities within the text.
2.5 Deliver persuasive arguments (including evaluation and analysis of problems and solutions and causes and effects): a. Structure ideas and arguments in a coherent, logical fashion. b. Use rhetorical devices to support assertions (e.g., by appeal to logic through reasoning; by appeal to emotion or ethical belief; by use of personal anecdote, case study, or analogy). c. Clarify and defend positions with precise and relevant evidence, including facts, expert opinions, quotations, expressions of commonly accepted beliefs, and logical reasoning. d. Anticipate and address the listener’s concerns and counterarguments.
2.6 Deliver descriptive presentations: a. Establish clearly the speaker’s point of view on the subject of the presentation. b. Establish clearly the speaker’s relationship with that subject (e.g., dispassionate observation, personal involvement). c. Use effective, factual descriptions of appearance, concrete images, shifting perspectives and vantage points, and sensory details.
Overview of the California Content Standards (Cont.)

California Content Standards easily applied in your classroom for VISUAL & PERFORMING ARTS, THEATRE:

**GRADE 9-12 – Proficient Connections, Relationships, Applications**

5.1 Describe how skills acquired in theatre may be applied to other content areas and careers.

**GRADE 5 Connections and Applications**

5.1 Use theatrical skills to dramatize events and concepts from other curriculum areas, such as reenacting the signing of the Declaration of Independence in history social science.

Content standards adopted by the California State Board of Education. For more information, visit: http://www.lpac.org/arts-for-youth.cfm

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**Theatre Etiquette**

- **Arrive on time**
  
  Plan for possible delays in travel and parking. Please arrive a minimum of 30 minutes prior to show time.

- **Students: Leave recording devices of any kind at home or in your backpack at school**
  
  Video or audio recording and photography, including camera phones, are often prohibited by law and may disrupt the performance. They are not permitted and are considered very rude to the others around you.

- **Teachers: Turn off or silence all personal electronics**
  
  Beeps, clicks, tones and buzzes and light pollution emanated by personal electronics such as watches, pagers, Bluetooth devices, cell phones, etc. interrupt the performance and spoil the theatre experience.

- **Observe the instructions of ushers**
  
  The ushers are present to offer assistance, ensure rules are observed and provide guidance in the case of an emergency evacuation. Please show them consideration. You will be asked to exit to the left of the theatre at the end of the performance.

- **Be respectful**
  
  While entering and exiting the theatre: Put your hands in your pockets or behind your back. Talk very quietly.
  
  Once seated: Do not talk. Keep your feet on the ground. Put your hands in your lap or fold your arms.
Theatre Etiquette (Cont.)

- Abstain from eating or drinking inside the theatre
  
  Crackling wrappers and containers and food messes in the auditorium are unwelcome. Food, candy, gum and drinks should never be brought inside the theatre.

- Avoid talking, waving and shouting during the performance

  Laughing and applauding are encouraged at appropriate times. Shouting to actors/friends is disrespectful to others. Save personal conversation for after the show.

  If you must talk, please whisper very quietly.

- Do not exit the auditorium during the performance except in the case of emergency

  If you must leave, please wait for an appropriate break in the performance. Teachers, please arrive early enough to escort students to the restroom prior to the start of the show.

- Do not get onto the stage or place items on the edge of the stage

  To ensure the safety and security of performers and audiences, this behavior is strictly prohibited unless expressly permitted by a performer or staff member.

- Dispose of garbage in proper receptacles

  Help preserve a pleasant environment by depositing all debris in appropriate receptacles.

- Extend common courtesy and respect to your fellow audience members

  Civility creates a comfortable and welcoming theatre experience for all.

- Bring very small children only to age-appropriate performances

  Small children easily become restless at programs intended for older children, and may cause distractions.

Be a Theatre Critic

During the performance watch for:

- Facial expressions and actions
- Use of Stage and Space
- Lighting, Music and Sound effects
- Vivid stories and word pictures
- Interaction with audience and each other
- Voice Dynamics: projection, volume, speed, rhythms and differing styles in speech
About The Mayhem Poets  
"...an amazing ride." -New York Times

“Let’s go see a poetry show!” is a sentence rarely proclaimed and usually responded to with cringes and excuses. The Mayhem Poets are on a mission to change that. Without props or sets, these three theatre trained, comedically gifted, lyrical virtuosos seamlessly blend rapid-fire poetry into theatrical performances by using raw elements of hip hop, theatre, improv and standup comedy to tell gut wrenching truths that leave audiences forever changed.

History of the Mayhem Poets

The Mayhem mission originated at Rutgers University in 2000, when Kyle Sutton and Scott Tarazevits started an open-mic on campus called Verbal Mayhem. Their idea was to find a way to access people from all walks of life with spoken word. As a result they reached out to prisons, fraternities, churches, and hip hop/poetry fans alike to attract the most diverse poetry open-mic scene in the world. The spirit of Verbal Mayhem convinced the two young performers to craft a show, go on a mission to change people’s lives and reshape society’s view of poetry. Their name, Mayhem Poets, is a play on the world-domination Mayhem Project mentioned in the film "Fight Club." But their only weapon is words, specifically the snappy, streetwise art known as slam poetry. But, their message is to write, not fight. Later, Mason Granger joined them. Since college, they have been performing at schools and theatres professionally for over 10 years.

A dynamic addition, on stage with the poets will be a versatile violinist, Josh Henderson. This classical/jazz violinist is a great counter to the hip-hop rhythms of the spoken word.

The Mayhem Poets have brought their experience to such notable venues as Capitol Center for the Arts in Concord, New Hampshire; The Kilkenny Arts Festival in Kilkenny, Ireland; The New Victory Theater in Times Square New York and the Calgary International Children’s Festival, as well as countless school districts, universities, detention centers, hospitals, poetry-slams and open mic nights. The Mayhem Poet’s unique approach to spoken word has also landed them feature spots on The Today Show and Eyewitness News, after winning 1st place and a grant for 100K in the Microsoft Idea Wins Challenge in 2006. They’ve toured internationally collaborating with hip hop legends such as KRS ONE and world class musicians such as Greg Patillo (beat box flute) and Jane Hunt (violin). Their CD, Reverse Birth was hailed as one of the Top spoken word CD’s of 2007 by about.com’s poetry section. Their NYC based educational training operation Slam Chops is providing opportunities for aspiring poets of all ages.

Mayhem Poets in Lancaster, CA

Putting an exuberant and unexpected spin on rhythm, these contemporary slam performers have developed powerful performances and workshops that motivate and inspire people of all ages and backgrounds to transform their lives for the better; and to craft and perform original poetry. In 2008, a workshop was held for Nancy Cory Elementary 4th and 5th grade G.A.T.E. students, who were intellectually and creatively stimulated. The children were completely energized and inspired. Last season, workshops were held here in Lancaster for “At Risk Students” at R. Rex Parris High School and Phoenix High School’s north...
and south campuses. They addressed real-life issues that troubled kids could relate to. Despite initial skepticism, the students were inspired and very receptive. The Mayhem Poets have an amazing ability to reach students in a way that others cannot. Role models of talent and respect, lessons are taught about avoiding violence, substance abuse, gossip and other negative sources. Instead, encouraging people to find a creative outlet; writing poetry as an alternative.

Accolades:
1. We would like to thank LPAC and whoever else was responsible for bringing this talented group of performers to our campus today. We were delighted with their presentation and somewhat surprised by the attention and obvious respect our high school students had for their message. We do not normally get groups like this and our staff, once skeptical, was taken aback by their talent level, message and connection with our students. There is no doubt we are a campus of “at-risk” youths and our students have seen and been exposed [to] too much that is negative. This performance had real potential for making a positive impact on our students and their lives. Please consider us again if fortunes bring this group back to the Antelope Valley. We feel lucky indeed to have been involved in this exceptional outreach show. -Phoenix High School Principal, Dan Brown

2. This was a wonderful exposure for our students to a live performance that was very professional and thought provoking. The students loved hearing the poets who were down to earth and communicated in their language. The students were attentive due to the relevancy of the performance. Great job! We loved their novel contemporary approach. Many students commented on what they saw and experienced firsthand. The poets were talented performers. -Phoenix High School Principal, Michael Clark

3. The program was wonderful. The gentlemen were great with the kids and were open to questions from the students. Many of the students even stayed after to thank them for the performance and ask where they could find more of their poems. The staff really enjoyed the performance and many came back for the second performance. The Mayhem Poets were awesome with these students and I hope they come back to the area for more performances. Thank you for the opportunity to have this experience. -R. Rex Parris High School Social Science Teacher/ASB Advisor, Laura Tweedy-Ferguson

Mayhem Poets’ Biographies

Kyle "Black Skeptik" Sutton was born in Michigan and raised in Jersey, where he learned how to "lyrically split atoms" and "Kill-em with Concepts." His smooth flowing, hard-hitting hip-hop style and dynamic theatrical presence have garnered him poetry slam victories across the nation, and brought him all the way to the Grand Slam finals at the legendary Nuyorican Poets Cafe’ in NYC. Skep’s solo hip hop project is currently being shopped to major as well as independent record labels. It includes songs featuring the likes of superstars KRS ONE and BUSTA RHYMES. With a B.A. in Spanish from Rutgers University, Skep can communicate with a multitude of audiences and has led writing and performance workshops around the globe. He dedicates all of his artistic endeavors to the memory of his mother, Barbara Sutton.
What’s Important to Know (Cont.)

Scott Raven was drawn to the stage since birth; his pacifier his first microphone. As a teen he became active in the local Jewish community giving Shabbat speeches and histrionic-filled haftorah portions, assuring his Jewish identity would remain an important part of his writing and career. His penchant for performance led him to Rutgers University where he studied Theater and Journalism. He co-created Mayhem Poets, blending his love for acting and writing. He co-authored and performed in two full length Spoken-Word Plays, Masque (2001) and New Street Poets (2005). He took Shakespeare and Voice classes at Stella Adler Acting Studio, and studied improv with UCB. He is working on a collection of Shakespearean "Sconnetts", a fictional novel loosely based on his touring experiences throughout elementary and middle schools; and has shot both a commercial and two independent films.

Mason Granger, originally from Willingboro, NJ, took his exceptional SAT marks & perfect score on the Math section of the NJ High School Proficiency Test and, rather than parlaying them into an Ivy League scholarship, instead took them to Rutgers University to pursue a life of poetry. Once there, Mason infused academia into his creative writings, resulting in a style that both Einstein and Emerson would admire. Sweeping thru the collegiate poetry scene like a breath of fresh air, Mason hosted the campus open mic Verbal Mayhem for 3 years, eventually becoming the poet laureate of Livingston College. He’s been described as everything from "brilliant" to "a sexier version of Barack."

Summary

About Spoken Word Poetry

Spoken-word poetry has been around for literally hundreds of years. Many of the poems that students still study in books began as performance pieces. William Shakespeare is probably the best-known performance poet, because all of his plays were written in verse and were meant to be performed. In fact, it was Shakespeare’s actors who finally wrote his plays down so that we can study them today. Without this effort, all of his great plays would have died on the stage, soon after they were performed.

Spoken-word also has strong roots in the West African griot tradition. The griot was a storyteller and historian who spoke or sung the history of his people, and was the basis of an oral tradition that is still alive today among Africans in their homeland.
Poetry Games

Poetry Race Activity
A tongue-twister race can be a fun way to turn poetry into a game. Try to say the following tongue twister as fast as you can. Who can say it the best and the fastest?

Betty Botter
Betty Botter bought some butter.
"But," she said, "The butter's bitter.
If I put it in my batter, it will make my batter bitter.
But a bit of better butter –
that would make my batter better."
So she bought
a bit of butter, better
than her bitter butter.
And she put it in her
batter, and the batter
was not bitter.
So 'twas better
Betty Botter bought
a bit of better butter!

How good a tongue twister are you?

40 seconds and over:
Too slow. Your grandparents could say the poem faster.

30 to 40 seconds:
Not bad. You’re probably one of the fastest talkers in your class.

20 to 30 seconds:
Pretty good. You’ve been gifted with a fast jaw.

15 to 20 seconds:
Excellent. You can out-talk anyone around.

14 seconds or less:
You are a tongue tying champion!

Rhyme Time Riddles

Practice rhyming with these fun riddles. Each answer is a rhyme. Answers are at the end if this section.

Example: What would you call a silly mistake made by a policeman? Answer: A Trooper blooper!

Riddle #1: What would you call a wealthy tattletale?
Riddle #2: What would you call a talkative taxi driver?
Riddle #3: What would you call a really great investigator?
Riddle #4: What would you call a tiny house for ducks?
Riddle #5: What would you call a shy nerd?
Thinking About Written Poetry

What do you think about when you hear the word poetry? There are many kinds of poems:

Some poems make us LAUGH.
Some poems make us THINK.
Some poems are SHORT & FUNNY.
Some poems are LONG & SERIOUS.
Some poems RHYME.
Some poems DO NOT RHYME.

See if you can find examples of different types of poetry in your school’s library. Try to write a few poems yourself. It is alright if they are not perfect at first – writing good poems takes practice!

old pond
a frog jumps
the sound of water
(by Matsuo Basho)

Violets are blue.
Roses are pink.
Put on your shoes,
your feet really stink.
(by Bruce Lansky)
Answers to Rhyme Time Riddles

Riddle #1: A rich snitch! - Riddle #2: A gabby cabby! - Riddle #3: A super snooper! (or effective detective)
Riddle #4: A quack shack! - Riddle #5: A meek geek!

Play Your Part

You have an important role to play; it wouldn’t be a performance without you! Your part is to pretend the stories are real. Part of this includes accepting certain theatre ways, or conventions:

1. Performers tell the story with words (dialogue), actions (blocking), movement and sometimes songs.
2. Performance Poets tell stories and depict their feelings through rhymes or rhythmic verse.
3. Performers may speak to the audience.
4. Performers may play several different characters (doubling) by changing their voice, costume or posture.

How to play your part:

A performance is different from television or a movie. The actors are right in front of you and can see your reactions, feel your attention, and hear your laughter and applause. Watch and listen carefully to understand the poems, verses and stories. The stories and ideas are told by the performers and comes to life through your imagination.
Words to Know

Poet: A writer of poems. One who is especially gifted in the perception and expression of the beautiful or lyrical.

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.): Greek philosopher. Pupil of Plato, tutor of Alexander the Great, and author of works on logic, metaphysics, ethics, natural sciences, politics and poetics; profoundly influenced Western thought. In his philosophical system, his theory follows empirical observation and logic (rational inquiry) rather than the abstract theories of Plato.

The 3 genres of Poetry, according to Aristotle: epic, comic, and tragic. The 3 major genres of Poetry, according to aestheticians: epic poetry, lyric poetry and dramatic poetry (comedy and tragedy as subgenres of dramatic poetry).

Lyric Poetry: more personal, shorter poems intended to be sung. These are called lyrics, which derives from the Greek lura or lyre, the instrument that was used to accompany Greek lyrics from about the seventh century BC onward.

Performance poetry: in the lyric genre; poetry that is specifically composed for or during performance before an audience. During the 1980s, the term came into popular usage to describe poetry written or composed for performance rather than print distribution.

Beat Writers: Post WWII America brought a new wave of artists, students, intellectuals and freethinkers to the Lower East Side of New York City, NY. The radical and countercultural spirit of the predominantly immigrant, working-class neighborhood inspired new art forms in literature, music, and performing arts which defined a generation.

Kora: a harplike instrument.
Suggestions for Discussion

**Poetry in the Neighborhood, Arts in the Economy**

1. Keeping up to date with contemporary world issues is a priority for the Mayhem Poets.
   - Why do you think this is so?
   - How do you think this helps them as they tour around to audiences all over the country, and how do you think this enhances their shows?

2. The Mayhem Poets Proved Art is Smart Business: One of the Mayhem Poets goals is to open poetry cafes across the country. Cafés have always been centers of literary culture – think of Voltaire in the first Viennese café after the coffee bean came to Europe, Hemingway and Henry Miller and others in the cafés of Paris, the Beats reading in San Francisco coffeehouses, etc. In recent years, poets have opened cafés and clubs specifically designed to serve as poetry performance venues -- Now big business has jumped into the poetry café phenomenon -- Microsoft has declared the Mayhem Poet's idea of a poetry café the best new small business idea in its Ultimate Challenge competition, and awarded the winners “$100,000 in start-up money, rent-free use of a New York City storefront for one year, and materials and software to help the winners get their business up and running.”
   - Do you think a Poetry Cafe’ is a good idea? Do you think it will be a successful business venture? Why or why not?
   - If you were awarded $100,000 to start-up a business, what would it be? Where would you start it? Who would you have help you, or would you do it all on your own?
   - Draw up a business plan and budget proposal.

3. “The Kora is the favorite instrument of the Griots of West Africa, who are traveling poets/storytellers/historians who carry in their heads (and hand down through their families) the musical and social traditions of the Mandinka or Mande peoples. Poetry is at the center of everything that happens in the villages of Gambia, Senegal, Guinea, and Mali. It is performed for the whole populace, not embalmed in classrooms and anthologies. This oral tradition predates the West’s conception of poetry by thousands of years, and if you’ve ever experienced it directly — full of jazz like solos and spontaneous outbursts of dance — you might just conclude that a society organized around poetry and music is a lot saner than ours”. - *Bob Holman & Margery Snyder, About.com Guide*
Suggestions for Discussion (Cont.)

- Do you think that music, poetry and the arts in communities is a benefit to the people who live there? Why or why not?
- What role do you think free expression plays at the core of American life? Do we enjoy freedoms that other countries do not?

*Anchors of all forms are critical in every community: that the nonprofits be supported, that [arts institutions] be supported. If you can have tax breaks for mega-corporations, why can’t you have a tax or rent break for a cultural center that’s done what [arts institutions] have done here? It’s the spirit of the place. Once it gets commercialized, the place loses its soul. Then we have definitely become a nation of consumers instead of a nation of citizens. - Bob Holman of the Bowery Poetry Club

- What are your thoughts on how neighborhoods change to be more commercialized rather than individualized, or rather than preserving historical structures and arts organizations and buildings?
- Do you think that the arts scene can be a switch point driving it toward a thriving cultural style, rather than more Starbucks and more high-rises?

4. Below are some Classic Poems for study. Questions follow each of the two poems. Please review the appropriateness of the material for your age group prior to sharing with your students.

Two Classic Poems

**I Hear America Singing**  
by Walt Whitman (from *Leaves of Grass*, 1900)

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear;  
Those of mechanics—each one singing his, as it should be, blithe and strong;  
The carpenter singing his, as he measures his plank or beam,  
The mason singing his, as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work;  
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat—the deckhand singing on the steamboat deck;  
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench—the hatter singing as he stands;  
The wood-cutter’s song—the ploughboy’s, on his way in the morning, or at the noon intermission, or at sundown;  
The delicious singing of the mother—or of the young wife at work—or of the girl sewing or washing—Each singing what belongs to her, and to none else;  
The day what belongs to the day—  
At night, the party of young fellows, robust, friendly,  
Singing, with open mouths, their strong melodious songs.

- In your own words, what do you think this poem saying?
- How would you describe the general mood of this poem?
- How do you think the author feels about America and his culture?
- What was a descriptive word that was used? Discuss its effectiveness. Discuss the feelings and or images this descriptive word evokes.
The Second Coming

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

- What do you think William Butler Yeats had in mind when he wrote this poem?
- What does the author mean, “pitiless as the sun”? 
- What do you think the author is implying with the line “twenty centuries of stony sleep”?
- What does the word “vexed” mean?
It has been said that the essence of great poems is their mystery, and that is certainly true of "The Second Coming." It is a mystery, it describes a mystery, it offers distinct and resonant images, but opens itself to infinite layers of interpretation.

What is your interpretation of this poem? Re-write the poem in your own words; or act as a critic and add your commentary beside the author’s lines. 

This study guide for “Mayhem Poets” was created by Lancaster Performing Arts Center.

Other resources consulted:
(Contents of links on the World Wide Web change continuously. It is advisable that teachers review all links before introducing them to students.)

http://query.nytimes.com
about.com: Poetry
East-Village.com
Mayhempoets.com
Poetryteachers.com