

the reading agency

This is a free sample of the type of content available to professional subscribers to groupthing.org – a website where young people can creatively engage with reading and words. To find out more about groupthing and how to subscribe:

www.readingagency.org.uk/youngpeople/groupthing or contact: info@groupthing.org

Running a Poetry Slam

What is a Poetry Slam? A slam is the competitive art of performance poetry. Participants (single performers or groups) perform their original work and are judged by members of the audience. Typically, the host selects the judges, who are instructed to give numerical scores (between 0 and 10) based on the poet's content and performance. The audience's job is to keep the mood supportive, energetic and encouraging to all participants.

Before you begin you'll need:

- A group of young people prepared to perform their own poems in front of an audience – either as individuals or in small groups
- An mc who knows the slam rules and feels confident enough to run a slam
- An audience!
- Score cards
- Prize(s)
- Certificates for all participants

How many young people can be involved?

You can make your slam as big or as small as you would like – so either within a class, across a year group or a Key Stage or 2 or 3 classes competing against each other. The main thing will be to identify the young people who will prepare and perform their own poems.

You may need to take different approaches to getting young people involved depending on how big you are making it: for eg: if you are running your slam across a year group you may want to invite young people to 'sign up' to take part and run a preparation workshop for them or you could work with one class all of whom take part in the slam and the audience is the rest of the year group.

Rules – performers/poets

- Each poem must be an original piece performed by the participant/group
- Poems can be on any subject and in any style
- No props, no costumes, no musical instruments, no pre-recorded music
- Performances are timed and should not exceed 3 minutes – timing starts when the performance or sound begins
- Heckling or disrupting of another performer's performance results in disqualification

Rules – judges

- Five judges are selected at random from the audience (no experience needed). Pulling names out of a hat is a good way to pick
- The judges must be fair and not to mark their mates higher!
- Judges are asked to award equal marks for both poem and performance
- Each judge is given a set of score cards from 0 to 10

Preparation

- Set-up a groupthing group page before the slam takes place as a space where young people can post, share and comment on their poems as they prepare them for the slam and where you can post any audio/video/image material
- Think about what video/audio recordings you may want to do: for eg: of the young people performing their poems (these could be done during preparation time and/or at the event); getting 'vox pops' from the audience; photos of the event; samples of other performance poets to inspire
- You may want to run a preparation 'rap 'n' rhyme' workshop prior to the slam to get those creative juices flowing and for the young people to get use to performing their poems - feature top tips on your groupthing page
- Make sure everyone's aware of the rules – post them on your groupthing page
- If you've got the budget, book and contract a poet who has had experience of running slams and who will be the host for the evening – they could also run a workshop for you
- Prepare your score cards (1 – 10) - you will need five sets of them
- Prepare certificates for everyone taking part – as everyone who enters the slam is a winner – and decide on a prize for the winner/s
- Pick a room big enough to host your poetry slam – for eg a drama studio – depending how big the room is you may need to use a PA system
- You may want to give your slam a theme around which the poems are written – make sure that potential participants know this
- Promote the slam event through the school

Instructions:

Slams are usually organised over three rounds. A poet/group may enter the same piece in all three rounds, but it's usually better if they write and perform different pieces each time. If you have a relatively small number of slam participants, you may need only one round to find your winner.

Round one:

- Each participant/group performs for 3 minutes.
- After each performance the judges are asked to hold up their chosen scores so that the audience can see them. The high and low scores are dropped, and the middle three are added together, giving the poet a total score of between 3 –30. The top third poets/groups go through to the next round

Round two:

- The process is repeated in Round two, with the top third going through the final round

Round three:

- Repeat the process again to find your winner.

At the end of the slam:

- Give the winner/s their prize and hand out the certificates
- Post a copy/audio/video of the winning poem on your groupthing webpage
- Thank everyone for coming and for taking part
- Pay your poet (if you've booked one) and take them back to the train station
- Use your groupthing group page to kick start a poetry group in your school

For more information on groupthing and The Reading Agency's creative reading initiatives and programmes for children and young people: www.readingagency.org.uk