

# PART THREE

## LESSON 2: SPEAKING POETRY OUT LOUD

Speaking a poem out loud is not for everyone. However, offering the opportunity in a low key, non-judgmental and safe way would help students understand the Spoken Word tradition, art form, and what the poets do. In this lesson, students have a choice of memorizing and speaking either well-known existing poems or their original work out loud.

### STUDENTS WILL:

- Listen to and describe a solo spoken word performance
- Select a poem to memorize or read, rehearse, then speak out loud. (You can also accept an alternative where students can rehearse a poem and read it out loud.)
- Build skills and ability to ‘communicate’ the words to others

### YOU WILL NEED:

- One or both suggested performances ready to play
  - ▶ **Joe Davis: “Who is Your Everyone”** <https://youtu.be/xLSbVaN4QdQ>
  - ▶ **Amanda Gorman: “Earthrise”** <https://youtu.be/xwOvBv8RLmo>
- Printed copies of student handout **Tips for Reading/Speaking Poetry Out Loud**, included with this lesson
- Printed copies of student handout **Poems, Haiku and Quotes for Poetry Out Loud**, included with this lesson There is a small selection included with this lesson

### WHAT TO DO:

**STEP 1:** The first element to discuss is **memorization**.

- Spoken Word Poetry is usually memorized. Ask students if they have ever **memorized** a poem or rhyme. For what occasion? If they have one in their head, can they still speak it? Ask for volunteers willing to stand up and recite something from memory.
  - ▶ Ask students how they memorize, not just poems, but facts, ideas, formulas? Do they have any useful advice for memorization? Write their suggestions on the board.
  - ▶ Is memorizing easy? Difficult?

**STEP 2:** A second element is the **way the poet performs the work**.

- Watch one of these solo SWP performances:
  - ▶ **Joe Davis: “Who is Your Everyone”** <https://youtu.be/xLSbVaN4QdQ>
  - ▶ **Amanda Gorman: “Earthrise”** <https://youtu.be/xwOvBv8RLmo>



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### MINNESOTA STATE STANDARDS CONNECTIONS

Music: Artistic Process(Perform or Present)

**Standard 1:** Perform or present in a variety of contexts in the arts area.

Speaking, Viewing, Listening and Media Literacy

**Standard 2:** Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

**Standard 6:** Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks.

**Ask students to notice details about what they see and hear. For example:**

- The sound of the voice.
- Interesting things the speaker does with their voice to get your attention.
- The flow of the words.
- Body language of the speaker; arms and hands, body, shoulders, head?
- Where is the speaker looking while performing?

**After listening and observing, ask what they noticed and summarize their responses on the board.**

**STEP 3:** Summarize and expand the ideas about memorizing and performing using the **Tips for Reading/Speaking Poetry Out Loud** handout. Read through the suggestions. Ask if students have question or any additions to the list.

**STEP 4:** Students select a short poem or quote. There are a few **included with this lesson**, or they can select one from another source.

- Decide if you need to approve their choice ahead of time. They can submit the poem and source to you.
- Set an end date for memorizing and speaking their poem.
- Reading a poem out loud, or speaking a short quotation with confidence are also Spoken Word performances.
- **Not all students want to do this. Please offer an alternative assignment for them.** For example: Illustrate a selected poem. Write a poem.
- Check progress along the way with a “recite as much as you can” session. Or practice in small groups.

**STEP 5:** Make **Poetry Out Loud Day** a celebration of student perseverance. The main goal is that all students tried, they learned new skills, and tapped into their capacity for a challenge.

# TIPS FOR READING /SPEAKING POETRY OUT LOUD

(Things we've observed in Spoken Word Poetry artists and storytellers)



## SUGGESTIONS FOR MEMORIZING

- Find a quiet place to work.
  - Read the poem out loud, then read it over and over.
  - While you work to memorize, write the poem down with pencil and paper – more than once.
  - Memorize one line at a time. Say them out loud.
  - Be patient.
  - Don't get frustrated!
  - Do turn off/shut down phones and laptops. It will help you concentrate.
  - Stand up and practice out loud to a mirror, an open window, with friends and/or family members.
  - Stand tall and sound confident – even if you are faking it.
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## PHYSICAL/BODY POINTERS

- Stand tall and lengthened.
  - Eye contact: look at your audience to make a connection.
  - Draw on your inner sense of confidence.
  - Enjoy the words you are speaking.
  - It is not necessary to move about while speaking. If you do, movements and gestures should be connected to the words.
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## SPEAKING TIPS

- **Attitude!** Sound confident, even if you are faking it.
  - If this is from memory, make sure you know all the words.
  - Don't forget to breathe!
  - Speak up – but don't shout.
  - Take your time; don't rush.
  - Articulate the words – make sure each word is spoken clearly.
  - Accentuate and emphasize words you find important or meaningful.
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## OTHER TIPS

- Chose poems/stories that you like – that you connect with.
- Understand the words you are speaking. (What is the message or BIG idea? What does it mean to you?)
- Know the meaning of all the words. Look them up, if necessary.
- Decide on how loud or soft you should recite. Is the poem or story about something quiet or loud?
- Decide how slowly or quickly you will speak.
- Find someone to practice with – a good friend or family member.
- More tips at:

▶ <https://www.poetryoutloud.org/tips-on-reciting/>

▶ A *New York Times* article for teachers interested in poetry for students.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/03/learning/lesson-plans/22-ways-to-teach-and-learn-about-poetry-with-the-new-york-times.html?searchResultPosition=1>

# POEMS, HAIKU, AND QUOTES FOR POETRY OUT LOUD

## BELIEVE

If you call a butterfly a caterpillar  
will she cease to fly at all,  
or only if she doubts herself  
will she then begin to fall?

If a caterpillar begins to dream  
she has wings and can fly,  
do her dreams become a chrysalis  
to help her touch the sky?

– Joe Davis

(*We Rise Higher*. Sparkhouse, 1517 Media (2023))

## DREAM VARIATIONS

To fling my arms wide  
In some place of the sun,  
To whirl and to dance  
Till the white day is done.  
Then rest at cool evening  
Beneath a tall tree  
While night comes on gently,  
Dark like me —  
That is my dream!

To fling my arms wide  
In the face of the sun,  
Dance! Whirl! Whirl!  
Till the quick day is done.  
Rest at pale evening...  
A tall, slim tree...  
Night coming tenderly  
Black like me.

– Langston Hughes

(Roessel & Rampersad: *Poetry for Young People*.  
Sterling Children's Books (2013))

## TWO ANCIENT HAIKU

An old silent pond...  
A frog jumps into the pond,  
splash! Silence again.  
– Matsuo Bashō

O snail  
Climb Mount Fuji,  
But slowly, slowly!  
– Kobayashi Issa

## A NEW HAIKU

You are filled with doubt  
Of the magic inside you,  
But it's all I see.  
– mindbodygreen.com

## EMOTIONAL WEATHER

A rainbow  
Colours in the sky  
Sunlight  
Reflection in the window  
Rain  
Downpour of my heart  
Storm  
Anger letting go  
Snow  
Peaceful in the night  
Fog  
Troubles to get through  
– Dani (2009)

<https://www.familyfriendpoems.com/poem/emotional-weather>

## THE ROSA PARKS

(A Poem in Rhythm)

do the rosa parks  
say no no

do the rosa parks  
throw your hands in the air

do the rosa parks  
say no no

do the rosa parks  
tell them: that's not fair

somebody's lying  
rosa prks him  
somebody's crying  
rosa parks her

shame the bad  
comfort the good  
do the rosa parks  
just like she would

sit down (1-2-3-4-5-6)  
stand up (1-2-3-4-5-6)  
sit down (1-2-3-4-5-6)  
do the rosa parks all over town  
– Nikki Giovanni

(Giovanni, Nikki (ed). *Hip Hop Speaks to Children*. Sourcebooks Ind. (2008))

## POEMS, HAIKU, AND QUOTES FOR POETRY OUT LOUD (CONTINUED)

### QUOTES

*“Children are supposed to be free spirits and dream chasers, thinking of limitless opportunities. They are supposed to be filled with light that shines with happiness and joy that shouldn’t be dimmed or filled with darkness and fear.”*

– Charlena E. Jackson

*“Fools multiply when wise men are silent.”*

– Nelson Mandela

*The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched — they must be felt with the heart.*

– Helen Keller

*You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose.*

– Dr. Seuss

### THERE WILL COME SOFT RAINS (War Time)

There will come soft rains and the smell  
of the ground,  
And swallows circling with their shimmering sound;

And frogs in the pools singing at night,  
And wild plum trees in tremulous white,

Robins will wear their feathery fire  
Whistling their whims on a low fence-wire;

And not one will know of the war, not one  
Will care at last when it is done.

Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree  
If mankind perished utterly;

And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn,  
Would scarcely know that we were gone.

– Sara Teasdale - 1884-1933

<https://poets.org/poem/there-will-come-soft-rains>