

Rhythmic Poetry/Spoken Word Sequence for Teachers

Objective: Students will be able to write, practice, edit, revise and perform a spoken word piece of rhythmic poetry on a topic of their choosing that incorporates elements of poetry that were emphasized in class.

How to get there - [Rhythmic Poetry Resource Folder](#)

Note - Rhythmic poetry works best when incorporated into a broader poetry unit. Students should be empowered with knowledge of several elements of poetry that they can incorporate into their spoken word pieces. You can [use this slideshow to teach several key elements of poetry](#) including: onomatopoeia, alliteration, rhyme scheme, syllables, metaphor, simile, hyperbole, personification, imagery etc.

1. **Rhythm Circle** - Let your students embody rhythm by allowing them to stand or sit at their desks, or in a circle, and stomp and clap on the 1 (stomp), 2 (clap), 3 (stomp), and 4 (clap). Use a slow paced rhythm for beginners.
 - a. Initiate a **call and response** sequence while maintaining the stomps and claps. Start by calling out the **1, 2, 3, 4** followed by the students' response. Then add the "ands" that go in between: **1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and**. Call and response. Finally, add in the e's and the a's by counting: **1 e and a 2 e and a 3 e and a 4 e and a**
 - b. Try mixing these beats into unique, custom patterns like: **1 and 2 and 3 e and a 4**. Continue with the call and response.
 - c. Now it's time to let your students come up with their own counting patterns. It is best to have instrumental music on in case students get off time. Use something with a slow tempo [like this song](#). Choose volunteers or go around the circle letting one student at a time perform a count within the rhythm of the stomps and claps. Everyone will repeat his or her count.
2. **Processing the Rhythm Circle** - Ask students to share what they **noticed, wondered or appreciated** about the rhythm circle activities. You may want to explain that our rhythm was in 4/4 timing which means that there are four beats in a measure (one measure is also called a "bar"), and each quarter note (1, 2, 3, 4) receives one beat in the measure. All of the other rhythmic counts are defined in relation to these four quarter notes.
 - a. As students share, prompt them until they can articulate that in the 4/4 time signature, we first divided the 4 beats by $\frac{1}{2}$ to create 8 counts (or $\frac{1}{8}$ notes): **1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and**. Next we took those 8 and divided them by $\frac{1}{2}$ again to create 16 counts (or 1/16th notes): **1 e and a 2 e and a 3 e and a 4 e and a**
3. **Transition to Writing** - Define/review syllables.

- a. **Syllable:** a unit of pronunciation having one vowel sound, with or without surrounding consonants, forming the whole or a part of a word; e.g., there are two syllables in *water* and three in *inferno*.
 - b. Let students know that each rhythmic count can be represented as a syllable in a word. Explain that it is very difficult to speak faster than 1/16th notes, or 16 syllables in one bar/line/measure (these terms can be used interchangeably). 8 - 12 syllables in one line/bar/measure is a comfortable amount for rap and spoken word (singers often use less because they hold notes for multiple beats).
 - c. When writing, the syllables can land on any of the rhythmic notes, just like how we counted to four in different ways in the rhythm circle. Each line/bar/measure does not need to start on the 1 (it could come before or after) and lines don't have to end on the 4 either (although this sounds nice and is easiest for beginners).
4. **One Bar Group Flows:** It's time for students to write. For long term success as rhythmic poets, students must know how to craft one bar/line/measure at a time and be able to keep each line on time with the rhythm. Therefore:
- a. Challenge students to write only 1 bar to get started. Take the pressure off and allow everyone to participate and be successful by putting students into groups for this activity.
 - i. To make one bar exciting, challenge students to use **internal rhymes** in their bar to get **at least three** one syllable rhymes in one bar. In the examples below, the syllables that land on the 2 and the 4 are underlined.
 1. **Ignite the light shine **bright** through the night.**
 2. I **sped** out of bed no **dread** in my head.
 3. **Aim** for the gain that is **sane** for the brain.
 4. **Brush** with just enough of a **plush** touch.
 5. Here is an example of a 16 syllable bar that rhymes a 2 syllable word 6 times in one bar, just to show students that it can be done:
Rippin' the rhythm gets **ridden, **dip** in the hidden **forbidden****
 - b. Give each group a one syllable word to rhyme with. They should quickly come up with a rhyme bank for that syllable before trying to write a sensical bar. **Example Syllables:** Group 1 - **light**, Group 2 - **mouse**, Group 3 - **hat**, Group 4 - **cold**, Group 5 - **win**, Group 6 - **blue**, Group 7 - **bed**, Group 8 - **feel** etc.
 - c. Put on a [slower tempo beat](#) while students write. Only give them a couple minutes for this one bar. If a group has written a bar in correct relation to the rhythm, they will be able to repeat that bar over and over again with the music, and it will match up with the rhythm in the same way every time.

5. Share Your Bars - Let each group have a turn sharing their one bar flow. For the best results, have the rest of the class repeat their bar in a call-and-response format. It's best if this happens twice for each group - call, response, call, response, then move onto the next group and try not to miss a beat between groups. It should be non-stop bars until every group has shared.
6. Once students can write one bar with awareness of the rhythm, they may be ready to work on a longer rhythmic poem, but would benefit from more inspiration and examples.
 - a. Use [this slideshow](#) to show an edited-to-be-school-appropriate version of a video called *Deconstructing Rap* by Vox and view the accompanying slides. This video will reinforce the 4/4 rhythm the students learned and provide inspiration and examples from some of the greatest to ever do it. It is very engaging.
 - b. Consider analyzing other rappers' lyrics. It helps to print out lyrics that students can annotate or discuss in small groups.
 - i. [Here is a link to the lyrics and music video for Kick, Push by Lupe Fiasco](#), which is a hip hop song about skateboarding that is good for classroom use
 - ii. [Here is a link to the lyrics and music video for Long Legged Larry by Aesop Rock](#), which is a song about a heroic frog that students always love.
 - iii. [Here is the link to the YouTube channel for Secret Agent 23 Skidoo](#), who is a grammy winning artist for best children's album. He is the king of kid hop and all of his music is incredible and appropriate hip hop for school.
 - iv. [This lesson page](#) from Artsintegration.net provides lessons designed around the spoken word poetry of **Amanda Gorman**. Amanda Gorman was the youngest person to deliver a poem at a US presidential inauguration and was named the nation's First Youth Poet Laureate at the age of 19.
 - c. It is also good for students to see examples of other kids performing spoken word pieces for inspiration and a confidence boost. [Here is a link to a document that has several examples of young, student poets](#) performing spoken word pieces.
 - d. Before students write their own rhythmic poem, they will need to decide on a topic and come up with a word and rhyme bank to use. Without a word and rhyme bank, many students get writer's block or just don't know where to begin.
 - i. [You can use this template](#) to create word and rhyme banks for selected topics. Consider doing this first as a whole group or in small groups before students try it on their own. Once they have the word and rhyme banks filled out, the writing really flows.