Slam Poetry

*Vocal exercise activity*

As you have watched from the example Youtube slam videos, slam poets’ performance in **how** they speak their words is extremely important to this type of poetry. Get with a partner and work your way through the exercises on this worksheet to start thinking about and practicing speech patterns, using the opening line to Sarah Kay and Phil Kaye’s poem, “When Love Arrives”:

“I knew exactly what love looked like in seventh grade.”

**Part 1: Sound.** First, let’s look at speaking individual sounds and words. Practice saying each word in the line individually, sounding out each syllable, like this:

/I/ /knew/ /ex/ /act/ /ly/ /what/ /love/ /looked/ /like/ /in/ /se/ /venth/ /grade/

Next, pick a single sound to emphasize. Say the line out loud, exaggerating that sound. For example, try emphasizing the “L” sound, like this:

“I knew exact**l**y what **l**ove **l**ooked **l**ike in seventh grade.”

Now to warm up your mouths a bit more, try saying it like this:

“I k**n**ew e**x**actly **w**ha**t** lo**v**e **l**ooked li**k**e in **s**even**th** gra**d**e.”

**Part 2: Rhythm.** Now, find the rhythm of the line. To do this, write in the stressed syllables with a / and the unstressed syllables with a ˘. Finish the line:

/ ˘ ˘ / ˘

I knew exactly what love looked like in seventh grade.

Now say the sentence out loud as if you are naturally speaking it. Say it again in the same natural way, but clap your hands along with each syllable to hear the rhythm. Which words go faster and which go slower?

Sarah and Phil also use pauses to change the rhythm of a line. For example, they say it like this:

I knew exactly what love looked like…in seventh grade.

Now it’s your turn. Pick a place (or several!) in the sentence where you would like to pause, and write it below, using … to indicate your pause:

How do your pauses affect the rhythm of the line? What does this do to the meaning?

**Part 3: Word Emphasis.** Next, let’s look at word emphasis. Say the line 5 times, each time putting the emphasis on a different word. For example:

1. ***I*** knew exactly what love looked like in seventh grade.
2. I knew ***exactly*** what love looked like in seventh grade.
3. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Which words did you choose? How did each difference affect the meaning of the line?

**Part 4: Emotion.** Now, say this line 5 times using the different moods listed below, in any order you want. Have your partner guess which mood you are using and write down the order. Do this for each partner and check for correctness when you finish:

* Excited \_\_\_\_\_
* Frustrated \_\_\_\_\_
* Wistful \_\_\_\_\_
* Sarcastic \_\_\_\_\_
* Proud \_\_\_\_\_

How does saying the line in these ways change the line’s meaning?