

NATIONAL  
POETRY MONTH

# Spoken Word



The first time I experienced poetry in school, I wasn't quite sure what I was in for. Then, I found out that poetry was a major influence on the music I loved and the historical figures I looked up to. I became fascinated with how poems shape our thoughts and stir our emotions. Once I started writing and performing poetry myself, it became my passion—and now it's my career.

JOSHUA WATKIS, Spoken Word Artist



“Spoken Word” is a form of poetry that puts together writing and performance. It brings a poem to life for the audience, and lets the author of the poem read and perform it the way they want it to be experienced. Spoken Word is meant to be enjoyed and shared in communities, like your school, to share stories and perspectives.

# Learning about Spoken Word Poetry

Let's jump right in. Here are some poems by young people just like you. After you listen to them, there are some questions for you to answer by yourself and then discuss with a group.

<https://youtu.be/lm0r3yFh0zU>

<https://youtu.be/jeb0uZBp39o>

<https://youtu.be/ICBPUX4922Q>



## Questions

The great thing is that, with poetry, there are no wrong answers. Just think about how the poem made you feel and the images that the words and performance brought to your mind.

1. What do you think the poem was about?
2. What did you like about the poem?
3. How did the poem make you feel?

# Poetry Power Play

Let's jump right in. Here are some poems by young people just like you. After you listen to them, there are some questions for you to answer by yourself and then discuss with a group.

**SIMILE:** This is a “comparison phrase.” A simile takes the characteristics of one thing and applies them to an unrelated thing using the words like or as.

Examples:

*“My mother’s face is like a rose.”*

*“His house was as big as a mountain.”*

Both of these phrases transfer what we know about the second thing [rose/mountain] to the first thing [mother’s face/house]. Because we know what the second thing is like, it helps us to understand the first thing better.

**METAPHOR:** Like a simile, a metaphor is also a comparison phrase and transfers attributes from one thing to another. Except, a metaphor doesn’t use the words “like” or “as.”

Examples:

*“His hands were sandpaper on my cheek.”*

*“The sky was an endless crystal ball.”*

**IMAGERY:** This literary device helps illustrate what you are writing about with the use of descriptive words [adjectives]. That makes it easier for your reader to imagine.

Example:

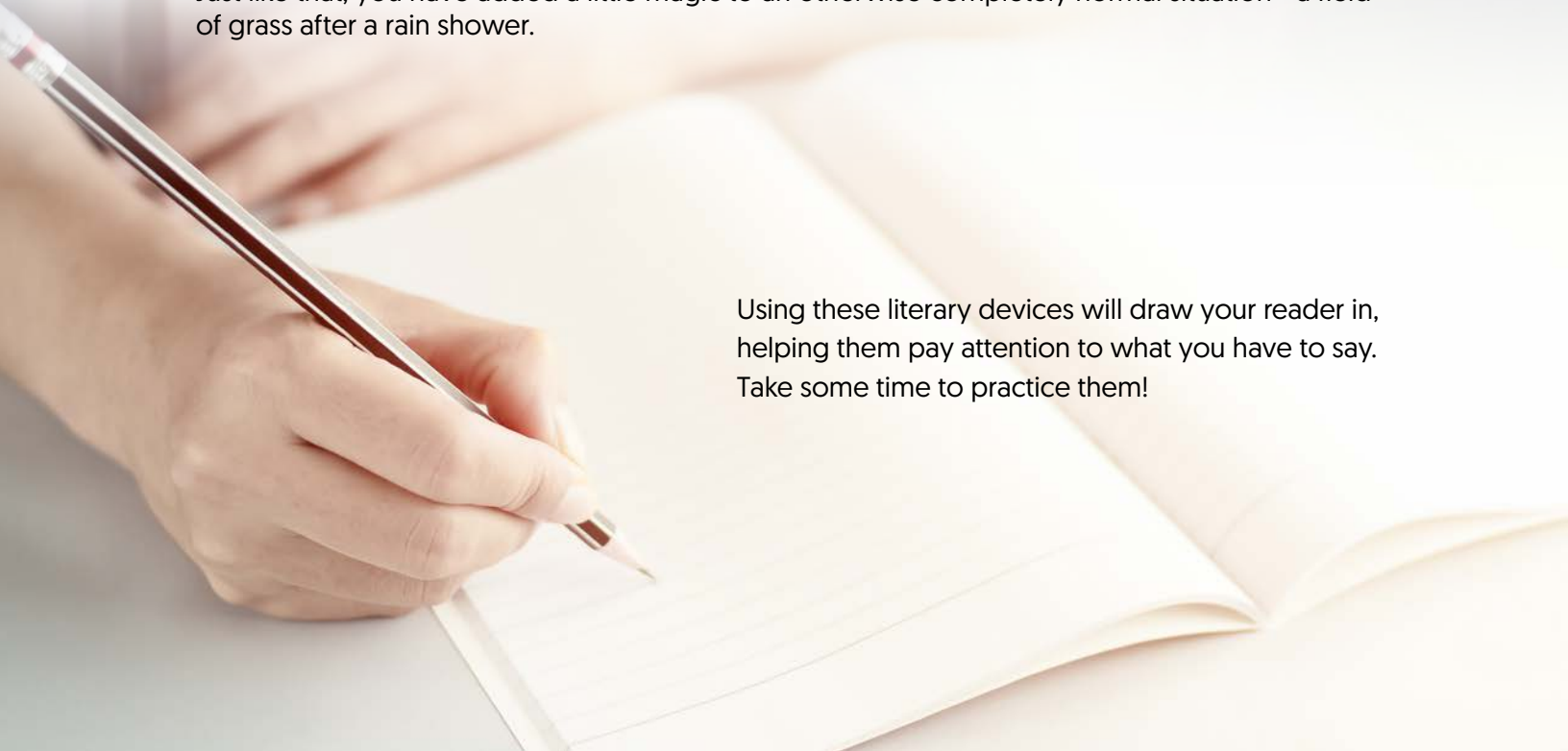
*“The field was a bright green and dripping, after the rain.”*

Notice how it’s easier to picture the field with the imagery words “bright green” and “dripping”?

Now, watch how you can combine all three of these literary devices into one sentence.

*“The field was a bright green and dripping, water glistening like glitter after the rain.”*

Just like that, you have added a little magic to an otherwise completely normal situation—a field of grass after a rain shower.



Using these literary devices will draw your reader in, helping them pay attention to what you have to say. Take some time to practice them!

# Poems with Purpose

Spoken Word that speaks about the world we live in requires some level of social awareness from those of us creating it. While you might be aware of your own culture and social events, you may need some help to create poems that reference history.

Here is an article about a poet who was commissioned to write a poem. He did some honest research to help communicate what he believed was an important message.

<http://tiny.cc/CCpoetry4>

Challenge yourself to look at important events in the last hundred years (the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, Stonewall, etc.) and the art that emerged at the time. Whether through song or spoken word, the poetry reflected the times. You have the ability to create poems and songs in a similar fashion.

## The Bravest Thing on Earth

So, you have finished writing your poem. It's full of literary devices, it says something about you and the world we live in... but something is missing. That something is your voice. Now, before you panic, remember that it is totally normal to be scared. In fact, in surveys, most people said they are more afraid of speaking in public than they are of dying.

All that means is, you are about to do the bravest thing on Earth. Share your story, in your words, out loud. Take a deep breath and stand up straight. Make sure your paper or laptop is in sight, but not in front of your mouth—you need to let everyone hear you. If you are too nervous to look at people, look directly over everyone's heads and focus on one spot. Read at your own pace and speak clearly. Before you know it, your class will all be clapping for you.

If you're in the audience, know that your classmate on stage is probably terrified and that they need your help. If you hear a line you like, you can snap your fingers softly as a way to encourage them. You can also gently stomp your feet or make an encouraging noise like, "mm-hmm" as a way to show them what they've said has connected with you.

If you get too wrapped up in the poem while the person is reading, make sure to give them a big round of applause at the end, so they know that they have been listened to and supported. Remember, Spoken Word isn't about who has the best poem. Spoken Word is about community. And listening is equally important when it comes to sharing your poetry.

Congratulations! Just like that, you've been introduced to the world of poetry. Hopefully, this has made the process easy and you will continue learning about this amazing art form.

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