

# Youth Speaks Teen Poetry Slam Guide 2017

(Updated 2/17/17)

\*Updates highlighted in teal

**2017 YOUTH SPEAKS TEEN POETRY SLAM**



***Presented by Youth Speaks***  
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## **What is Poetry Slam?** **A Brief History**

In 1984, construction worker and poet Marc Smith started a poetry reading at Get Me High Lounge, a Chicago jazz club. Smith was looking for a way to breathe life into the open mic format. The series—with its emphasis on performance and that anyone could be a poet or at least have an opinion on art - the democratization of the art form—laid the groundwork for what would eventually be known as poetry slam.

In 1996, James Kass founded Youth Speaks Inc. in San Francisco, and hosted the Teen Poetry Slam, the country's first-ever teen poetry slam. Forty-three young poets participated. Now, the annual event features close to 200 youth writers, emcees, and performers from throughout the Bay Area and Northern California, and attracts nearly 10,000 audience members. Our first slam became the seed that sowed a global youth poetry movement.

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## **Eligibility & Registration**

The Youth Speaks Teen Poetry Slam is an INDIVIDUAL slam open to all Bay Area youth ages 13 - 19 (*born after April 8th, 1997*)

**Register Online [Here](#)**

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/youth-speaks-teen-poetry-slam-2017-poet-registration-tickets-31174194856>)

**Registration is open NOW  
and throughout the entire slam season!**

**BOUT SCHEDULE ----- PRELIMINARY BOUTS****Thursday, February 16, 2017**

SoleSpace | 1714 Telegraph Ave. | Oakland | 19th Street BART

Doors &amp; Registration: 6:30 PM

Bout Time: 7 PM – 9 PM

**Friday, February 17, 2017**

826 Valencia | 826 Valencia St. | SF | 16th Street Mission BART

Doors &amp; Registration: 6:30 PM

Bout Time: 7 PM – 9 PM

**Saturday, February 18, 2017**

Brower Center - Richard and Rhoda Goldman Theater | 2150 Allston Way |

Berkeley | Downtown Berkeley BART

Doors &amp; Registration: 12:30 PM

Bout Time: 1 PM – 3 PM

**Thursday, February 23, 2017**SoleSpace | 1714 Telegraph Ave. | Oakland | 19<sup>th</sup> Street Oakland BART

Doors &amp; Registration: 6:30 PM

Bout Time: 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

**Friday, February 24, 2017**

826 Valencia | 826 Valencia St. | SF | 16th Street Mission BART

Doors &amp; Registration: 6:30 PM

Bout Time: 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

**Saturday, February 25, 2017**

Brower Center - Richard and Rhoda Goldman Theater | 2150 Allston Way |

Berkeley | Downtown Berkeley BART

Doors &amp; Registration: 12:30 PM

Bout Time: 1 PM – 3 PM

**Thursday, March 2, 2017**SoleSpace | 1714 Telegraph Ave. | Oakland | 19<sup>th</sup> Street Oakland BART

Doors &amp; Registration: 6:30 PM

Bout Time: 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM



## **PRELIMINARY BOUTS**

**Friday, March 3, 2017**

826 Valencia | 826 Valencia St. | SF | 16th Street BART

Doors & Registration: 6:30 PM

Bout Time: 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

**Saturday, March 4, 2017**

Berkeley Public Library - Community Room | 2090 Kittredge St |

Berkeley | Downtown Berkeley BART

Doors & Registration: 1:30 PM

Bout Time: 2 PM – 4 PM

## **SEMIFINAL BOUTS**

**Saturday, March 11, 2017**

Mission Cultural Center | 2868 Mission Street | SF | 24th St Mission BART

Doors & Registration: 1:30 PM

Bout Time: 2:00 PM – 4:00 PM

**Friday, March 17, 2017**

Impact Hub Oakland | 2323 Broadway | Oakland | 19th Street BART

Doors & Registration: 6:30 PM

Bout Time: 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

**Saturday, March 18, 2017**

Mission Cultural Center | 2868 Mission Street | SF | 24th St Mission BART

Doors & Registration: 1:30 PM

Bout Time: 2:00 PM – 4:00 PM

**Friday, March 24, 2017**

Impact Hub Oakland | 2323 Broadway | Oakland | 19th Street BART

Doors & Registration: 6:30 PM

Bout Time: 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

## **GRAND SLAM FINALS BOUT**

**Saturday, April 8, 2017**

Nourse Auditorium | 275 Hayes St. | SF | Civic Center BART

Bout Time: 7:00 PM – 10:00 PM

**General Admission Tickets: \$5 Youth | \$10 Adults | \$50 VIP**

## Rules & Guidelines

*Although we de-stress the competition, we have come up with the following guidelines to clarify the rules of the slam. Please abide by them so as to avoid controversy and keep the focus on the fun and expansive nature of poetry and the slam.*

- *How Many Poems Will I Need?*
  - ❖ In order to register to compete in the Teen Poetry Slam, you only need two poems: one standard length poem and one lightning round poem, to be used in the event of a tie.
  - ❖ If you advance to the Semifinals and Grand Slam Finals bouts, you will need a total of three poems: two standard length poems and one lightning round poem, to be used in the event of a tie.
- *Standard Length Poems:* must be under 3 minutes, 30 seconds long. The poet will also have a 10 second grace period, after which scores will be penalized 0.5 for each 10 seconds beyond, starting at 3 minutes 40 seconds (e.g. up to 3:39 – no penalty; 3:40 to 3:49 - .5 point penalty; 3:50 to 3:59 – 1 point penalty, etc.).
- *Lighting Round Poems:* In the event of a tie at the end of any of the bouts, a lightning round will be added in order to break the tie. Poems performed during the lightning round must be under 1 minute, 30 seconds in length. We will also have a 10 second grace period, after which scores will be penalized 0.5 for each 10 seconds beyond, starting at 1 minute 40 seconds (e.g. up to 1:39 – no penalty; 1:40 to 1:49 - .5 point penalty; 1:50 to 1:59 – 1 point penalty, etc.).
- *Repeat Rule:* Poets may NOT perform the same poem more than once *within* the same Bout but they are allowed to repeat poems *between* Prelims, Semifinals and Grand Slam Finals Bouts (i.e. you can perform the same poem in Prelims and Semifinals AND Grand Slam Finals, but you cannot perform the same poem in both rounds of Semifinals or Finals). Poets that repeat the same poem in both Rounds of the same Bout will be disqualified.

<b>Preliminary Bout</b>	Round 1
	Lightning Round (*in the event of a tie*)
<b>Semifinals Bout</b>	Round 1
	Round 2
	Lightning Round (*in the event of a tie*)
<b>Grand Slam Finals Bout</b>	Round 1
	Round 2
	Lightning Round (*in the event of a tie*)

- *Bring New Work:* Poets are NOT allowed to use poems performed in past slam seasons, including previous years of The Teen Poetry Slam, Unified District Poetry Slam, and Brave New Voices. Poets who perform poems from past slams will be disqualified.

- *Bring Original Work:* Poems must be original writing by the competing poet.
- *No Props:* No props may be used in the Slam. Props are defined as any non-body piece of equipment. Musical accompaniment (excluding mouth/ body percussion) may not be used in the Slam.
- *Be Responsible For Your Words:* There is no censorship whatsoever, but gratuitous use of profanity could work against you when it comes to scoring. It is recommended that you try to avoid excessive violence, sexually explicit content and/ or language that degrades any group of people. Please, do it for the love.
- *Phones:* Phones are discouraged on Preliminary and Semifinal stages. No phones are allowed on Finals stage. Plan accordingly with paper and/or memorization.
- *Judges:* The slam will be judged by a mixed panel of volunteer poets, adults and young people. Many judges are preselected, and some may come from the audience. We will aim for diversity.
- ***Silent Scoring:* We won't be announcing scores at this year's slam in order to keep the focus on the poetry, not on the points. If you like, you can get your scores from the host at the end of each bout.**
- The top scoring poets from Preliminaries will advance to Semifinals. The top 12 scoring poets from Semifinals will advance to the Grand Slam Finals.
- ***If I Don't Make it to Semifinals, Can I Compete Again?* Yes! If you don't move onto Semis, you can talk to people at front of house to get on the waitlist for another upcoming Preliminary slam! Please note that in order to make sure we get as many new poets on stage as possible, participants are only allowed to waitlist for another Preliminary bout once and are not guaranteed to get on stage.**
- If you were a Finalist in last year's Teen Poetry Slam, you get an automatic slot in the Semifinals. This means you do not have to compete in a Preliminary bout.

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### **Content/Trigger Warnings**

- *What are Content/Trigger Warnings?*  
We believe that poetry is charged and can be therapeutic and healing. We also believe in emotional safety and disrupting retraumatization. A content/trigger warning is a statement that warns the audience that the content they are about to watch, hear, etc contains material that could cause distress. Some trauma survivors or people living with PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) appreciate hearing a content/trigger warning before listening to a performance because it helps them prepare themselves to manage trauma responses while witnessing the piece. Content/trigger warnings are just one way we can help respond to the emotional and psychological wounds we constantly carry with us. We will strive to have a SPOKES support table at each Bout with resources for poets and audience members.

## **Content/Trigger Warnings (Continued)**

- *How Will Content/Trigger Warnings Be Used In The Slam?*  
There will be a collective content/trigger warning issued by the MC at the top of each slam. Poets are invited (though not required) to do more specific content/trigger warnings at the beginning of their poems, if they so choose. Participants may also have the MC issue the more specific content/trigger warning for them. If participants are interested in having the MC issue a content/trigger warning, they can arrange this by talking to a SPOKES member at the SPOKES support table. Content/trigger warnings will NOT count against the poet's time (i.e. the Host will still start the stopwatch at the beginning of the participants' poem, not the content/trigger warning).
- *How Do I Give a Content/Trigger Warning?* Content/trigger warnings can take many forms but for first-timers, you should focus on being brief and letting the audience know what sensitive topic(s) will come up in your piece.

Here are a few examples (feel free to use them!):

1. *"Content warning: sexual violence"*
2. *"Trigger warning: domestic violence and self-harm"*
3. *"Content note: gun violence and suicide"*

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## **Elimination of Poets at Finals**

There will be 12 competing poets at the Grand Slam Finals on Saturday, April 8th, 2017 at The Nourse Theater. There will be two rounds. Only the top 8 scoring poets of the first round will advance to the second round.

Round 1: 12 Poets  
Round 2: 8 Poets

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## **What Could I Win?**

Beyond a year's worth of bragging rights and the chance to share your voice with your peers and community, the top 5 scoring finalists are also eligible to be on the team representing the Bay Area at The 2017 Brave New Voices International Youth Poetry Slam Festival. This year's festival will be July 19 to July 22 -- and it is coming back home to The Bay!

**See Pg. 8 for more on Brave New Voices & Team Eligibility**

## **Tips & Advice**

- *Practice Your Poems:* We encourage you to become intimately familiar with the poems you will compete with. Memorization is not required (music stands will be available at all venues), but you want to really bust your piece. Rehearse! Know your poem.
- *Don't Worry 'Bout The Judges:* Judges will be given criteria for judging on both writing and performance quality, and will serve more as encouragers of young writers than judges. This will be as standardized as possible, but like each of us, judges come with their own biases for and against certain topics and styles. Remember, the standard is yourself. Be your own best "judge."
- *No Really, Don't Worry 'Bout The Judges:* Judges will be seated together at a table. Their scores will be passed down to the event host, who won't even announce them aloud this year. We do this because we want to keep the focus on the poetry, not on the points.
- *Do It For The Love:* Be respectful of yourself, the youth writing community, and the community you represent. Come to share your story *and* receive.
- *Have Fun:* If you don't get high scores, so what? It says nothing about your abilities and potential as a writer, thinker, and cultural leader. By getting on the mic and telling your story, you are already doing something powerful, helping to fight alienation and bring the noise from the margins to the core.

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## **Beyond the Slam**

We are so excited that you are participating in this year's Teen Poetry Slam! We sincerely hope the slam is just one part of your experience with Youth Speaks. Please join us at some of our other FREE upcoming programs:

- [Writing & Performance Workshops \(Weekly\)](#)
- [Under 21 Open Mics \(every 2nd & Final Friday\)](#)
- [Oakland Youth Poet Laureate \(February\)](#)
- [Unified District Poetry Slam \(April\)](#)
- [SPOKES Youth Advisory Board \(Apps Due May 26\)](#)
- [MC Olympics](#)
- [Queeriosity @ Brave New Voices \(July\)](#)
- [Brave New Voices \(July 12 - 16\)](#)

For more, please visit [YouthSpeaks.org](http://YouthSpeaks.org)

## **Brave New Voices 2017** **& The Youth Speaks Bay Area Team**

### **What is Brave New Voices?**

The Brave New Voices International Youth Poetry Slam Festival is much more than a poetry slam. It is a week-long series of workshops, performances, and other transformative events focused on bringing together young poets so that they can tell their story and create new pathways toward artistic growth and civic engagement. Originally founded by Youth Speaks in 1998 after the success of the Teen Poetry Slam, the first festival had 4 teams; we now have over 500 young poets representing 60 team from cities and regions across the world. Brave New Voices takes place in a different city across the US each year.

*This year, Brave New Voices is coming back home to The Bay, July 19 - 22*

### **What does being on the Youth Speaks Bay Area BNV Team entail?**

The Youth Speaks Bay Area BNV Team is one of Youth Speaks' most sacred rites and long-honored traditions. Youth Speaks Bay Area BNV Team members will represent the entire Bay Area at the 2017 Brave New Voices International Youth Poetry Slam Festival. This is an all-expense paid trip that allows team members to meet and deeply engage with some of the most amazing young poets from around the world. In addition to meeting an international network of incredible poets, team members will get individualized support and the opportunity to grow as part of a close-knit community of some of the Bay Area's strongest young writers and performers. Former Youth Speaks Bay Area Team members have gone onto become actors, teachers, organizers, activists, published poets, renowned playwrights, and globally touring performers. Among them include: George Watsky, Chinaka Hodge, Jason Mateo, Shannon Matesky, Dahlak Brathwaite, Jade Cho, Rafael Casal, Natasha Huey, Obasi Davis, Joshua Merchant, Sarah O'Neal, Aleah Bradshaw, Nyabingha Zianni, Bryant Phan, and many more.

Being a part of the Youth Speaks Bay Area Team means having an individual commitment to personal artistic development and cultivation of craft. **Team members are expected to attend regular practices, retreats, and performances multiple times a week beginning the week of April 9 and ending with Brave New Voices in mid-July.** After the festival, team members will be encouraged to continue to write and work independently and perform representing the 2017 Youth Speaks Bay Area BNV Team at future Youth Speaks events.

### **Who can be on the Youth Speaks Bay Area Team?**

- Participants must be born after July 22, 1997 (the festival is limited to participants 19 years of age and under on the date of Brave New Voices Finals)
- Participants may only be on the Youth Speaks Bay Area Brave New Voices Team a maximum of two times (However, these poets may still compete to be the Grand Slam Champion at the Teen Poetry Slam)