



# Youth Speaks Teen Poetry Slam Guide 2015

**2015 YOUTH SPEAKS TEEN POETRY SLAM**

*Presented by Youth Speaks*



## **How Did Poetry Slam Start? (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 the democratization of the art form—laid the groundwork for what would eventually be known as poetry slam.

In 1986, Smith established the weekly poetry competition at the Green Mill, an infamous jazz club and former haunt of Al Capone's. The Uptown poetry slam, which started the trend of 5 judges, high and low score dropped, etc., continues to run every Sunday in Chicago to this day.

In 1996 ten years later, James Kass founded Youth Speaks Inc. in San Francisco, and hosted the first Teen Poetry Slam.

Please read on for information on eligibility, slam rules, and for this year's slam dates!

## **ELIGIBILITY**

**It's an Individual Slam  
Open to all Bay Area youth ages 13-19**

## **REGISTRATION**

– Register Online @

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/youth-speaks-teen-poetry-slam-2015-poet-registration-registration-14231465697>

– Fill out a Teen Poetry Slam Registration Form

**Deadline to register is Tuesday, February 10, 2015**



## **PRELIMINARIES**

### **Thursday, February 12, 2015**

SoleSpace | 1714 Telegraph Ave. | Oakland | 19<sup>th</sup> Street Oakland BART

Registration: 6:30 PM  
Bout | 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

### **Friday, February 13, 2015**

Intersection for the Arts | 925 Mission St #109 | SF | Powell Street BART

Registration: 6:30 PM  
Bout | 7 PM – 9 PM

### **Saturday, February 14, 2015**

Pegasus Books | 2349 Shattuck Ave | Berkeley | Downtown Berkeley BART

Registration: 12:30 PM  
Bout | 1 PM – 3 PM

### **Thursday, February 19, 2015**

Intersection for the Arts | 925 Mission St #109 | SF | Powell Street BART

Registration: 6:30 PM  
Bout | 7 PM – 9 PM

### **Friday, February 20, 2015**

SoleSpace | 1714 Telegraph Ave. | Oakland | 19<sup>th</sup> Street Oakland BART

Registration: 6:30 PM  
Bout | 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

### **Saturday, February 21, 2015**

Bindlestiff Studio | 185 Sixth St | SF | Downtown Berkeley BART

Registration: 12:30 PM  
Bout | 1 PM – 3 PM



## **SEMI-FINALS**

**Friday, February 27, 2015**

Oakland Museum of California (The Lecture Hall) | 1000 Oak Street | Oakland | Lake Merritt BART

Registration: 6:30 PM  
Bout | 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

**Saturday, February 28, 2015**

SF Main Public Library (Koret Auditorium) | 100 Larkin St. | SF | Civic Center BART

Registration: 6:30 PM  
Bout | 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

**Friday, March 6, 2015**

Oakland Museum of California (The Lecture Hall) | 1000 Oak Street | Oakland | Lake Merritt BART

Registration: 6:30 PM  
Bout | 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

**Saturday, March 7, 2015**

SF Main Public Library (James Moore Theater) | 100 Larkin St. | SF | Civic Center BART

Registration: 6:30 PM  
Bout | 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

## **FINALS**

**Grand Slam Finals | Saturday, March 21, 2015**

The Nourse Auditorium | 275 Hayes Street | SF | Civic Center BART  
7:00 PM – 10:00 PM



## **GUIDELINES**

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

- Poems must be original writing by the competing poet.
- 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.
- Poets must keep to the time limit of 3 minutes and 30 seconds. If a poet goes over the time limit, their score will be penalized .5 for each 10 seconds beyond 3:30, 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.).
- 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 are degrading to any group of people. Please, do it for the love.
- The Slam will be judged by a mixed panel of poets, adults and young people. Many judges will be pre-selected, and some may come from the audience. We will shoot for diversity in the judging panel.
- The top 16 scoring poets from the Semi-Finals will advance to the Grand Slam Finals.
- If you were a Finalist in last year's Teen Poetry Slam, you get an automatic slot in the semi-finals. This means you do not have to compete in a preliminary bout.
- No phones are allowed on Finals stage. Plan accordingly with paper and/or memorization of pieces.

### ***Frequently Asked Question: HOW MANY POEMS DO I NEED TO COMPETE IN THE TEEN POETRY SLAM?***

**ANSWER:** In order to register to compete in the Teen Poetry Slam, you only need 1 poem, as there is only 1 round in the Preliminary bout. However, if you advance to the Semi-Finals and Grand Slam Finals bouts, you will need a total of 2 poems. See below for important rules regarding repeating poems.



**\*\*RULES REGARDING REPEATING POEMS:**

- Poets are NOT allowed to use poems used in previous Youth Speaks slams, including past Teen Poetry Slams, Unified District Poetry Slams, and Brave New Voices. Poets who use poems from past slams will be disqualified.
- If poets advance, they are allowed to repeat poems between Prelims, Semi-Finals and Grand Slam Finals bouts. However, poets may NOT perform the same poem more than once within any single bout. (i.e. you may not perform the same poem in both Rounds of the Semi-Finals bout). Poets that do not abide by this rule will be disqualified.

**\*NOTE:** The Preliminary bout is 1 Round (1 poem needed), the Semi-Finals bout is 2 Rounds (2 poems needed - 1 may be repeated from Prelims), and Grand Slam Finals bout is 2 Rounds (2 poems needed - one or both may be repeated from Semi-Finals or Prelims).

**At the very least, poets need 2 original poems for the entire Slam. See graphic below as an example.**

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**Elimination of Poets at the Finals:**

There will be 16 competing poets at the Grand Slam Finals on Saturday, March 21, 2015 at the Nourse Auditorium. There will be two rounds during that evening. After the first round, only 8 poets will be advance to the second round:

Round 1: 16 Poets

Round 2: 8 Poets

**The Top 6 Poets will become the Bay Area Team representing at Brave New Voices in Atlanta from July 14 to July 18, 2015.**



## The Bay Area Team at Brave New Voices

### **What is the history and purpose of Brave New Voices Festival?**

Youth Speaks first founded Brave New Voices as the National Youth Poetry Slam in 1998, after the success of the local work in the Bay Area. The first national slam had 4 teams; we now have over 50. Brave New Voices is about bringing together young poets from across the globe so that they can create new pathways toward artistic growth, civic engagement, and youth development. BNV takes place in a different city each year. Its formal name is the Brave New Voices International Youth Poetry Slam Festival.

The Bay Area Team will be expected to attend weekly coaching sessions with their coaches, Gabriel Cortez (Poet Mentor Fellow and Host for the Grand Slam Finals) and MC K~Swift (Lead Artist).

Attending Brave New Voices in Atlanta is an all-expense paid trip that allows the Bay Area Team to meet and engage with other young poets from all over the country and around the world.

### **Tips & Advice**

- 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.
- 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.”
- Judges will be seated together at a table. Their scores will be passed down to the event host, who will read them off from low to high. We do this because we want to allow the judges some anonymity, and to not have poets get angry or too happy with any one judge. Take responsibility for your words. Be smart.
- Be respectful of yourself, the youth writing community, and the community you represent.
- Have fun in this process. 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 a mic and telling your story, you are already showing your strength and character.

**Thank you for sharing your stories with one another and with all of us!**