

# Judging the Youth Speaks Teen Poetry Slam

**Thank you for serving as a judge at the Youth Speaks Teen Poetry Slam!**

The judging job is one of the most critical roles of the entire month-long event. The judges – who should think of themselves as encouragers of young writers 13-19 years old – help set the tone for the entire evening. The key is fairness and consistency.

There are three rounds of activities during the course of the Slam: the Preliminaries, the Semi-Finals, and the Grand Slam Finals. Depending on when you are judging, you will witness varying degrees of experience on the stage. During the preliminaries, there are many first timers, a lot of very raw and exciting writing, and many exceptional surprises. By the time we get to the Finals, with only 16 poets from the hundreds who participated in the preliminaries, you will see true stars on stage.

As a judge, you are asked to place a “Score” on each poem, immediately following the performance. Poems will be no longer than 3:30, and cover a variety of topics.

You have three primary criteria by which to “judge” the poems. They are:

- The Quality of the Writing
- The Quality of the Performance
- Content of the Work

It is up to each of you, individually, to determine your own standard for quality of excellence. For some, strong writing may focus on the clever usages of language, the uniqueness of point-of-view or topic, the clarity of metaphor; some may focus on the content of the poem, the passion behind the idea, and the rhyme scheme employed. This is all fine, as long as you are both fair and consistent. The same is true for performance; we don't care if you focus on choreography, sound of the voice, the passion in which the poem is performed, or the way the poets move their bodies. All we care about is that you are fair and consistent throughout the night.

**Your scores will be completely anonymous.** We do not ask you to hold your scores up; instead, immediately after the poem ends, we ask you to jot your score on a provided index card, and pass it down to your host, who will then call out the scores from low to high each time. No one will ever know what scores you give on any poem.

Overall, we try to downplay the scoring as much as possible. We all know how silly it is to put a number on a poem, but all of the poets come in knowing the rules of the game, so we want to keep the rules clear.

Have fun. Clap and laugh and cry as much as you want to. Stand up and jump around. You will be booed. There is no doubt about it. The crowd wants all 10's, and while we love high scores, you can't give everyone a ten. All we ask is that you do your best and make your own determinations based on your own criteria.

## **What is Score Creep?**

Scores will rise as the show advances, a phenomenon known as “score creep”. We do not know why score creep happens, but it happens every time. To balance this out, the poets who go earlier in the first round go late in the second. We also will give you an individual scoresheet that you can use to keep track of what you scored poems in earlier rounds. This is not mandatory to use, but we have found it helps keep your scores consistent.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Susie Lundy, Bay Area Program Director at slundy@youthspeaks.org or 415.255.9035 ext. 21.