

Spoken Word Poetry

What is Spoken Word poetry?

Spoken Word poetry is a very newly revived form of poetry that has been around since the 1990's. Humorously enough, the term "Spoken Word" started as a sign label in record stores for non-musical selections like famous speeches and orations. During the 1990's an increased interest in the Beat poets who were really dissatisfied with the world, and wrote really powerful poetry that was meant to make a statement.

Today, Spoken Word poetry is a very general category of poetry that is meant to be both performed and to make a powerful statement. Unlike some of the Beat poets who were interested in only shouting about the really rotten things in the world, Spoken Word poetry is more interested in voicing the problems and offering hope.

All Spoken Word poetry is meant to be read aloud, but not all poetry that is read aloud is Spoken Word.

How does Spoken Word poetry work?

That is a big question. Technically speaking, Spoken Word poetry is heavy on three elements, and in this order—

1. Rhythm—Even though Spoken Word is written in free verse, it has a definite driving rhythm, but not a regular rhythm like in sonnets or limericks. The rhythm is more closely related to the free verse rhythm that keeps the poem moving from one line to the next.
2. Repetition—Spoken Word poetry uses repetition like a wheel uses a hub and all the spokes link in the hub. Spoken Word poets return the same word or phrase multiple times within the poem to keep the reader returning time and again to the central focus.
3. Rhyme—While there is not a specific rhyme scheme, like in limericks or sonnets, the rhyme in Spoken Word is used to direct the reader's ear toward a particular idea or theme. The entire poem is never rhyming. Rhyme is used in delicate balance with rhythm and repetition as a tool for the poet.

Spoken word poetry is sometimes performed with music, and sometimes without music. If a poet uses background music, it is only to enhance or compliment the poetry. The poetry is center stage, not the music.

So, is Rap Spoken Word poetry?

There are conflicting ideas on whether or not Rap is poetry, but let me try to present both ideas. On the one hand, Rap can be a strand of Spoken Word poetry. It is very concerned with rhythm, repetition, rhyme and full ideas that are meant to be performed. So, a spoken rap would fit into the category of Spoken Word poetry. But, let me clarify—Rap music is a specific kind of music. Music plays almost a more important role than the

words. How many times have we heard of people who listen to rap music “just for the beat?” Though there are poetic elements to Rap music, it is a difficult task to separate the music from the rapping with many artists. There are new rap artists who are including Spoken Word poetry on their albums as a new forum for their ideas.

How do I write Spoken Word poetry?

First, start with a cause! What are you angry about? What needs change in your world? Start with those issues that you want to address.

Next, make a word bank of important words that you want to include in your poem. Listen to how the words and phrases sound. Are there any that you could hinge your poem around?

Finally, start writing! Say your words aloud to hear them. After all, it is SPOKEN WORD POETRY!!!