

Slam

ENG 457: Special Topics in Poetry Writing
Slam & Spoken Word
Winter 2012
5 Credits

Poetry Slam Rules

1. The Golden Rule of Poetry Slam: The points are not the point. The point is poetry.
2. Each poem must be the original work of the poet.
3. Each poet is allotted three minutes to perform one poem. There is a 10-second grace period, after which the poet will incur time penalties.
4. Just the poet and their poem on stage. No props, costumes, or musical accompaniment are allowed.
5. Five audience members are selected on a volunteer basis to serve as judges. The judges consider the quality of the writing and performance of each poem and assign a score on a scale from 0.0 to 10. For every score, the highest and lowest scores are dropped, and the final score for the round is calculated by adding the three remaining scores together.

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Just the poet and their poem on stage.

In a place that is equal parts art gallery, café, wine bar, and event venue, Matt sits in the audience amongst dozens of others.

From the stage, I choose to tell him (and a room full of strangers) that I will not take his last name if we marry. I look at his face as I perform my poem “Will You Take This, Woman?”. I look at his face as I deliver all 661 words within less than three minutes.

I tell him I do want to marry him, but he must understand that I cannot take his last name. From birth, I’ve been defined by my relationship to men. I tell him how schoolteachers would use my father’s last name to scold Miss Smith for talking, Miss Smith for passing notes. “Miss Smith” was always used for silence. Would being his Mrs. be any different?

I tell him that, thereafter, I vowed no man would ever mark me or possess me again. I would prefer to shed my last name and simply be Danielle. Alas, even then...

When my mother was pregnant with me, 24 years old, ultrasound gel covering swollen belly, the doctor told her to prepare room for her beautiful baby boy. She set her hands to looking through scripture, fingers finally landing on the book of Daniel, meaning “God is my judge.” Daniel, a prophet who speaks in visions and dreams. Maybe she thought—like his namesake—her son too could face any lion’s den and be found faultless in the eyes of God.

I tell him to note my two extra letters: the “L” and the “E.” Daniel is an abbreviation of me. I am “Danielle.” I am more expansive than Daniel.

In my final words, I tell him:

*Let me become like a map that you cannot refold:
let me remain open and stubborn and take up space
I will not be quiet and diminutive
I will be loud and unruly
Let my name not equal me, and not even be forever
unchanged, but for now, let my name remain*

I step off stage, walk to the table where he sits, kiss him on the head, and take my seat next to him.

On her way out the door, a woman grabs me lightly by the arm, pulls me in like she's telling me a secret: "I didn't take my husband's last name when I got married." She winks and walks out.

Maybe not the most tactful way to tell him. But the only way I know. Perhaps here, with witnesses, he cannot pretend he has not heard me.

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POETRY SLAM: 2nd PLACE

COURSE GRADE: A