

## **Slam Poetry and Cultural Experience for Children**

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Slam poetry, being not just recitation or memorization, affords children the opportunity express their own personal cultural experiences and values. Slam is a spoken word performance; a competition among poets. Audience commentary is ongoing during the performance and vigorous audience participation is essential in a slam format. The founders of slam, Marc Kelly Smith and Bob Holman, seek to reintegrate poetry into everyday life. The topics of slam poetry reflect the life experiences of the poets. The performance of the poem injects the poet's emotional thrust of the words. The competition creates a dynamic relationship between poet and listener. These characteristics of the slam format make it a robust vehicle for teaching children to appreciate poetry and enhance their relationship to language. Due the personal nature of the poem presented in slam, the use of poetry slams is also effective in presenting and respecting cultural or ethnic values. The paper explores the history of slam, children's reactions to slam, and the merit of slam competition in teaching literacy skills.

### **Introduction**

Poetry is entwined with the lives of children from infancy--lullabies and nursery rhymes at birth; street rhymes, incantations, and the traditional forms of poetry at school-age. Drawn to limericks, nursery and street rhymes, children have used poetry for play and language expression--roll the sounds in their mouths and jauntily spit them out. School age experiences with poetry turn to recitation and memorization of poetry. These experiences are focused on poetry as a genre, the structure of poetry, or the study of traditional Western poets where exposure to the emotional and observational experiences of others is the lesson's center. Adults distort the poet's work into a meaningless, detached bundle of words by using structured models to write poetry (haiku, rhyming schemes, acrostics, etc.) and forced memorization of "classic" poems to chant poetry, . The introduction of slam performance of poetry into children's lives can salvage a relationship with poetry.

### **Brief History of Children's Poetry**

There was no poetry written expressly for children before 1804 (Darton 1982, 182). Early verse that was considered suitable for the younger audience was just that, verse. The Puritan period provided verse to save the soul; the Georgian, to create good character (Segel 1986, 167). Didactic or moralistic, the verse provided to children's ears was not really about their world. It was not written *for* them, but to satisfy the ideas that adults held about what children should be interested in. Real childhood experiences were simplified or codified to represent the moral values of the time period. In the early nineteenth century, poetry and poets emerged that provided a better relationship to real childhood experiences. William Blake's *Songs of Innocence* was child oriented. The Misses Taylor wrote for children as did Mary and Charles Lamb.

However, critical opinion does not regard these as superlative poetry for children (Darton 1982, 251); rather these poets continue the tradition of providing what they think children should experience, not what children actually experience. Darton (1982) states, “ninety per cent of all verse written for children before the last quarter of the nineteenth century was poetry-substitute, manufactured in good faith, but in a deliberate purposeful way. It was not perceived that children were their own spontaneous poets—the makers of their own world of imagination.”

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries continued to provide the same types of poetry to children’s ears. A few collections truly reflected childhood gaiety and experience. Lewis Carroll, Laura Richards, Edward Lear, A.A. Milne and R.L. Stevenson explored childhood pleasures and fears in their poetry. The post World War II era adult attitude about childhood shifted to a child-centered concentration. Recognizing the power of the market for child-focused materials, publishers provided true children’s poetry. Poets such as Shel Silverstein, David McCord, Eloise Greenfield, and Jack Prelutsky (to mention only my favorites, there are many, many more) provided anthologies that grace the shelves of libraries and are included in personal collections. As children’s poets of other cultures and ethnicities<sup>1</sup> gained a foothold in the school library, there are now many anthologies of quality readily available. The emotions of poetry now reflect diverse group experiences. The drudgery of poetry was no more! Adults can now provide poetry to attract, engage, and embellish the life of a child.

### **Why Poetry?**

The content of poetry is emotion—emotion expressed in strong compact language. The connection with the world is the goal of poetry and poetry can diminish borders of prejudice, isolation, stereotypes, and Robert Frost calls poetry “a performance of words” (Lukens 1986). McVeigh-Schulz & Ellis (1997, xi) calls attention to the “poem as container for feelings”. Articulated with just a few well-chosen words, poetry is the story of experience. “The inward experience of story...helps a child to gain what we all strive for as human beings – a sense of personal identity, a sense of control over one’s own existence, and a sense of connection with others in the world” (Vandergrift 1980). Children want to create stories—their stories. They want validation and confirmation that they are valued by the world. The rhythm of poetry is in sync with the heartbeat of new life and provides reassurance that the world, although unpredictable

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix for such collections.

and unknown, can be managed. The personal nature of creating poetic image, rhythm, and meter offers a limitless opportunity to foster a grasp of language and emotional understanding. “Any time we ask children to write, we run the wonderful-and terrible-risk that they will tap into powerful feelings” (McVeigh-Schulz and Ellis 1997, 63). The acceptance of pluralism and diversity (Sparks 2002) that accompanies slam competition allows children to teach others about their culture and learn from others as well. “Testimonial language legitimizes and makes visible that which has been veiled of invisible in the dominant media culture...” (Sparks 2002, 13).

Children need to choose and create poetry that expresses their own personal lives. Poetry by its nature is creates an aural encounter and the recitation of poetry that children choose or create is the logical step for ensuring that they acquire a lifelong love of the sounds of language and its power to craft imagery. The bond between the listener and orator is created more quickly than just a text on page communication. Oral poetry is more sophisticated than print poetry in that gesture, expressive tones, pacing can add color and meaning to the words. The audience contribution with real time response gives oral poetry a “dynamism that cannot be found in written work” (Svoboda 1980-81, 10). Poetry slamming is one approach.

### **Slam Style**

Slam reinvents the oral tradition, but is not just a spoken word recitation; it is also competition amongst spoken word performers. “The performance poem depends to a great part on the quality of the performance. It lives and dies in a day” (Kooser 2007. xviii). Slam is characterized by “Bravura performance” (Deamon 2001, 374) and live, real-time audience feed back. Slam remains poetry at its heart even though competition, entertainment, and interaction with the audience are compulsory elements. It is a social art. Wheeler states, “Slam poetry is inherently social, dialogic poetic form.” (2008) Poetry eligible for slam performance must reflect personal emotions and experiences. The poetry is not recited, is not read; it is performed with emotion and depth. The audience response is a vital contribution to the performance. Judging is done by randomly chosen audience members. Thus, the affective qualities are judged by people without the credentials of critics—they know what they like and vocalize their opinions during the performance (and after with a scoring routine). The competitive facet adds an improvisation opportunity for the poet—the audience feedback during performance allows adjustment to the performance or the text.

Not just a reincarnation of the Beat poets of the 1950's and 1960's, slamming represented an evolution from the African American spirituals to the Harlem Renaissance to the Beats to the Black Arts Movement of the '70s to the rappers. Gioia (2003) believes that the most interesting aspect of slam is not its personalities, but “the unusual mixture of radical innovation and unorthodox traditionalism in the structure of the work itself and the modes of its performance, transmission, and reception.” With three-minute limits and a truly critical audience, slammers put themselves on the line.

Although slam poetry is often delivered with a hip-hop vibe, it is not confined to the hip-hop culture. Hip-hop grows out of a culture and has influenced poetry slam due to the incursion of young African Americans into the art form. Their immersion in hip hop has led to an influence on performance at slams. The rhythm of hip hop provides rich fodder for slam. Slam poetry arose from a poet's vision, not limited to a specific culture. The essence of a slam poem is emotional punch; the generation of authentic, personal experience laid bare as spoken word poetry. One's reaction to the experience is communicated during the performance; the listeners respond to the force of the words and the performance. Unlike a poem on a written page, the author has the opportunity to provide interpretive guideposts to the listener. The listener still has freedom to read or add meaning to the work, but new opportunities of response are available. The poet guides the listener; the listener gets to provide immediate feedback. The experience on both sides is empowering and formative.

Poetry slams can be controversial. Dismissed, repulsed, exalted, and embraced by critics of all levels, Marc Smith's website eats the critical disdain up. (Smith 2009) It's all “free” publicity for the good or bad! Gaudy, trashy, genuine, contemptuous, insolent, heartfelt—whatever your opinion, you have to give the slam style some regard and credibility as an engagement scaffold to poetry.

### **Highlights of History of Poetry Slamming**

#### *Chicago and the Green Mill*

In the 1980's adult poetry slams were initiated in Chicago, Illinois by Marc Kelly Smith first at the *Get Me High Lounge* and continuing at a small jazz club called *The Green Mill*. Smith's intention is to empower the audience and take poetry back to the “people” (out of

academia). He purposely wants the judgment of quality to reset with the masses; let the poet and the audience think out of the box and decide what is authentic, valuable, and earnest. (Gonzalez 2007, 23)

### *Nuyorican Poets Café New York*

Bob Holman was part of Chicago's slam scene in the 1980's. The popularity of the Green Mill slams led him to New York City for the first slam in 1987. Based at the Nuyorican Poets Café (founded by Miguel Algarin in the 1973), Holman is not just associated with the slam style; he now teaches at Columbia University in New York City. Quirky and in-your-face, he is a proponent of poetry as a democratic art. Poetry slams continue at the Nuyorican Café along with other performance art forms.

### *Hip-Hop and Rap and Slam*

The correlation of slam subject matter to hip hop culture is coincidental in that Marc Kelly Smith did not rely upon hip hop artistry for the origin of slam. Russell Simmons' Def Poetry Jam brought slam and hip hop together and brought commercial success and acknowledgement to slam. Def Jam featured black artists, but the audience was black and white. By providing a forum for black culture, Def Jam displayed 'hip-hop aesthetics and a claim to marginal identity "...conveniently presented to mainstream audiences..." (Somers-Willet, "Authenticating Voices", 2003). According to Gioia (2003) hip-hop (rap is the lyric) follows a set rhythm meter (dance beats of  $\frac{3}{4}$  or  $\frac{4}{4}$  with stress on 3<sup>rd</sup>) whereas meter for poems in slams follows no rules. Hip-hop emphasizes rhythm, street language, strong images, free-wheeling improvisation. The themes in hip hop and slam poems spring from the Black Arts Movement that advanced the life story/experiences of non-mainstream populations.

### *College and Young Adult*

The strong emotional nature of slam poems is a natural for young adults age 18-30. Trying to establish or identify their place in the world, slam poetry writing naturally lends itself to articulation of their feelings and observations of the world around them. The charisma of Russell Simmons and his production of the Def Jam introduced poetry as contemporary expression to this generation. The spread of hip-hop culture (clothing, speech, attitude) among all races also established slam as a popular form of expression for this age group. Following the Def Jam success, MTV provided a forum for spoken word by provision of time on its Unplugged

series. The 1997 fiction film, *Slam*, the 1998 documentary, *Slamnation*, and the founding of PoetrySlam, Inc solidified slam as a legitimate artistic form. Although not limited to slam, Youth Speaks founded in 1996, is an American group promoting spoken word. Its vision is to “Shift perceptions of youth by combating illiteracy, alienation, and silence to create a global movement of brave new voices bringing the noise from the margins to the core” (Youth Speaks).

### *Inter-cultural and International Slamming*

Slam scenes are currently present in all cultures and areas of the world. From an interview with a young Native American slammer, Alex Jacobs, we hear this, “So it's like, forget that; the poetry you want is to get deeper into your own language and thinking. To me, that's what needs to be done if in the end you want Indian children writing creatively” (Abbott 1995). Wheeler identifies a distinct American poetic community of ethnic minority poets who “create parallel institutions in order to reach audiences” (2008, 15). The majority of celebrated slammers are African American—the format possesses what Somers-Willett calls “ghettocentricity” (“Authenticating” 2003, 136). National slams are found in Germany, Canada, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden, and Australia. International slam has been hosted in Sydney, Warwickshire, Rotterdam, Singapore. Slam is well-established in the Western world and PoetrySlam, Inc. (as of 2009) promotes a more vibrant presence in Asia.

### **Slam Poetry Content**

Since slam seeks to integrate everyday life and art, slam themes and “plots” deal with everyday issues—family, coming-of-age, and sociopolitical events. As a class, slam poems carry an urban vibe, portray a grittier view of life, are counter-mainstream, convey culture, and sport an activist position. Poetry as “a site of cultural conflict” is particularly evident in slam (Wheeler 2008). Hoffman (2001) “points to the fact that the spoken word in the U.S. in recent decades is tied up in powerful social movements that reframed—and validated—cultural identities of minorities...” Reflections and opinions upon these topics embody the distinctive spirit of each poet’s offering to the slam. Without the personal point of view, the performance would be ineffective and squander the entire purpose of spoken art. Slam poems do not deal with light hearted observations or items in one’s spatial environment as many children’s poems do.

Anthologies of slam poems contain strong, gut-wrenching images and words. Cursing, sexual, racially strong, misogynist language prevails in many of the poems. Stars of slam such as

Beau Sia, Saul Williams use the same earthy language found in hip-hop. When written by the generation ages 16-30, the language is their norm (Jay 2000) “Critics cite that the language of slam poetry is often intentionally shocking and/or provoking, rather than carefully constructed to satisfy a particular aesthetic” (Carson).

Slam poems use rhyme and free verse to unconditionally create the mood, beat, and meter of choice. Lyricism is not a hallmark of a slam poem. Painting beautiful images is too mundane for slam poets! Look at me or look at the world in a new way--an aggressive view is thrust upon the slam audience. The language of the poem and the intonation of the poet labor in unison to rivet the audience to the work. Slam performance can only be ignored if it is poorly performed and contains trite or counterfeit content.

The observations of local and national slam poets indicate that race and ethnic themes are prevalent—angry themes dominate. Slam poets may “spit” poems that are authentic to their culture/ethnic group, but the experiences are not their experiences! Cultural mores and lore are conveyed, but one wonders if the poetry of slam ought to communicate the poet’s experiences rather than what must be a common history of the group. For example, the poems of Saul Williams are skillfully and intricately constructed and the language is bent and manipulated to raise awareness and create a new view of the common. He uses irony and double-entendre to draw in pop references, “I need a fix of that purple rain” (Williams 1997), referring not only to Prince’s song of, but to the slang for marijuana. Sounding out the common themes of oppressed, marginalized peoples, one might wonder if the poems are “authentic” since it is obvious that many of the verse images are not Williams’ experiences.

The literature on slam concurs that a thread of social justice, activism, and counter authority runs through slam content. Johnson (2006) discusses the collective identify as a required element in hip hop poetry. Somers-Willet (“Slam Poetry” 2005) conjectures that the audience regards the first-person poem as a “confessional experience” and the slam poem becomes an identity piece encompassing socio-political ideas as well as personal ones. Audiences love the sharing of experience that a slammer conveys, but comments from audience members in suggest that marginalized identities are particularly favored. (Somers-Willet, “Slam Poetry” 2005) The communities of hip hop (and slam) revolve “around the articulation of identity in oppressed and power-laden communities” (Johnson 2006). Many of the slam poets no longer are in the “oppressed” class, another strong aim of slam must be raising awareness for

those groups who do not have the wide stage that poets such as Holman, Mali, Sia, and Aptowicz have.

Examination of poetry anthologies and critical works reveals recurring themes in the poetry of ethnic groups. Poetry reveals what a people values or experiences through generations. It really is “a window into the soul” (Hammontree) not only for an individual identity but for a nation, race, religion, or other aggregate group.

Table 1  
Themes in Poetry by Racial / Ethnic / Religious Identity

African American	Hispanic	Native American	Asian American	Muslim	Caucasian
Family inc. Step parents	Family	Family	Family	Family	Family
History / Africa /Slavery / Freedom	Home country and migration to America	Nature	Home country and migration to America	Traditions	Material things
Urban life	Hope / Joy	Song	Nature	Religion	School
Skin color (shade)	Honesty	Ceremonies	Bias		Teenage angst
Jargon / dialect / Song rhythm	Recognition of beauty in nature	Identity	Beauty of language (flowery)		
Church / Call and response	Native country food				
Jazz / blues	Hard work				
	Domestic life				
	Bilingual				

Each culture has recurring images and topics found in anthologies of poetry targeted to child audience (table 1). Shared images are present, but each has its own emphases that distinguish one from another. Experiencing literature that authentically portrays a group, can give insight into what the group values. Slam poets write their material with a uniquely personal viewpoint—it may or may not be authentic to the culture as a whole, but it is valid from their perception of experience. Providing access to these collections can help children find a performance poem that reflects their own feelings—even though they did not write the poem, there are shared values in the poetry to which they can relate.

**Using Slam with Children**

If one accepts the idea that slam poems are opportunities to express personal and collective identity, then slamming provides children with a venue to connect to poetry so that their attitude towards poetry is positive and self affirming. Vandergrift (1980) states that “...one of the easiest and best ways for young writers to get a critical perspective on their own written work is to read



it aloud". The "critical perspective" is intensified with performance rather than just reading—the difference between the two is one of emotional punch and personal investment in the words. Slam conveys culture as a personal interpretation of values and desires. Paulo Freire (1970) posits that students, who struggle with written texts, are more engaged with texts that represent cultural expression that are native to their lives. When choosing the poem they want to perform or in writing their own, the child must think about the sound of the voice work, about their body language, and about the theme of the topic. The process provides meaningful, powerful expression that affirms their experiences. Sparks (2002) thinks it helps "to think of poetry slams as critical spaces where identities are formed, cultural lives and social conditions are critiques." This concept suggests that slamming poems instead of just reciting, writing, or studying affords real engagement with the spoken word. To the writer, this is a precious gift to users of language.

Although, writing one's own slam poem is the adult standard, children may use other poet's work as a scaffold to full-fledged poetry writing. The poem selected should be one that the child can use to express his own thoughts, experiences, and feelings. Once affirmed by the audience (or not) the child starts to understand what in their culture is rich with material for poetic expression and the oral competition that is slam.

The language of young adult and adult slam is not the language of children! Shocking, grim, violent, and vivid images prevail in the expression of personal experience. Is it a requirement of slam? Of course not. For elementary and middle school students, the feelings can be expressed with language that is suitable for their age.

The first poems that children perform for a poetry slam should be drawn from the canon of high quality children's poets. Providing existing poetry as a scaffold helps the child to see how poetry is structured and expressed. The child chooses the poem from the provided collections—chooses a poem that has relevance to personal emotions. The American awards for children's literature are good starting places for finding high quality poems. The Coretta Scott King Award, the Pura Belpré Award<sup>2</sup>, and many others have been awarded to poetry collections

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<sup>2</sup> American Library Association website will provide information for these awards <http://www.ala.org/ala/awardsgrants/booksprintmedia/childrenyngadults/index.cfm> Coretta Scott King Award is awarded to "African American authors and illustrators for outstanding contributions to literature for children and young adults." The Pura Belpré Award "is presented to a Latino/Latina writer and illustrator whose work best portrays, affirms, and celebrates the Latino cultural experience in an outstanding work of literature for children and youth."

that reflect the culture of the award. Selection guides such as Beverly Slapin's<sup>3</sup> work or the Oyate<sup>4</sup> website provide guidance on choosing authentic poetry. What children's poets provide material that would be strong enough to mirror real life experiences? This paper will feature only a few from the numerous possibilities.

Eloise Greenfield wanted to write "the truth about African Americans" (Scholastic). Not romanticized, not stereotyped, just the real life experiences that she had as an African American woman. Ms. Greenfield's poetry mirrors the lives of modern African American children and, if the child chooses a poem that reflects their cultural experience, it is a poem suitable for slamming.

Naomi Shihab Nye "...gives voice to her experience as an Arab-American through poems about heritage and peace that overflow with a humanitarian spirit." Children who share her heritage may share her poems as their experience. Slam style allows them to use her words, but give those words personal intonation, mood, emphasis, and rhythm.

Francisco X. Alcaron says, "I carry my roots with me all the time/Rolled up I use them as my pillow." His poetry is family inspired (from his grandmother's songs) and they carry the memories of his Mexican/American upbringing. (Colorin! Colorado!)

Here, from *America Scores*, is a child's poem that expresses deep emotion and cultural information. Children are capable of producing intoxicating works if the proper scaffolding with poetry precedes their own work. Slam style can be the hook that draws them to express themselves as poets. The last three lines of this 9 year old's poetry reveal his fondness for his Honduran roots.

**Mi Felicidad<sup>5</sup>**

Yo fui a la playa con mi familia en Honduras

Me hace sentir como una nube en el cielo

Yo quiero volver a ese tiempo cuando estaba en Honduras

(Norman B., age 9 Walton School America Scores!--Cleveland)

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3 Beverly Slapin has several books to guide choice. One is *How to Tell the Difference: A Guide to Evaluating Children's Books for Anti-Indian Bias*

4 Oyate website: <http://www.oyate.org/aboutus.html>

<sup>5</sup> ...I went to the beach with my family in Honduras

It makes me feel like a cloud in the sky

I want to go back to the time I was in the Honduras.

## Conclusion

The high value of language skills is not in dispute, but how does one engage children in refining and elevating those skills in their own lives? The “bathed in bits” generation has been surrounded (overwhelmed) by words since toddlerhood. (Tapscott 2008) Social network sites, instant messaging, text messaging, gaming, etc. envelope them in print, but the print is at vernacular level--shorthand and slang (Vaughn and Boudreau 2009). The disconnection between school learning and life learning (Sparks 2002) interferes with cultural literacy and critical thinking skills. Street smarts and book smarts are two different things. Desired educational outcomes should be grounded in the intersection of these two sets of ‘smarts’. Does creating and performing slam poetry elevate the critical/cultural literacy skills or can slam coalesce the pair of smarts? Since slam is an art form intended for the proletariat, it would seem to be counterintuitive that the slam form would develop higher level language skills. Low level language use and grassroots art form are not correlated. Look at the intricate work by Saul Williams’ or Cristin O’Keefe Aptowicz. The customary poetic devices and finely tuned language exist in their work to provide models for students. The media (performance and competition) is not the message! There is strong structure and word play in the best slam models. As Coval states in Elevald (2007) slam poetry is the construction of consciously confrontation radical collages. These are structures that require using the best words to convey the most emotion—how else would one confront or create a radical collage? The language of the poem, the poem’s frame, and the performance meld to create a powerful oral piece. All of the traditional “rules” of substantial poetry writing apply, but the slammer can twist the rules to create a transformational poem. An “ongoing relationship with the written and spoken word” is really the goal of teaching language arts. (Somers-Willet, “Authenticating” 2003) The rites of passage, identity complexities, and family relationships are the matter of powerful poetry.

School libraries, public libraries, and youth services entities are perfect venues for slam. These are tax supported bodies and policies that affect their funding should embrace non traditional techniques to connect children to literacy activities. However, in contemporary budget shortages, “...such endeavors are fragile, vulnerable not only to policy and political changes, but also to blows such as test-based assessments and non-arts subjects and the related lack of time and space in the school day...” (Bodilly 2008). Dimitriadis suggests that the media culture has overtaken the school lives of young people and adults who dismiss or disregard popular culture

will be ineffective in teaching. “The coherence often assumed inherent in schools and school curricula has been replaced...by the multiple, overlapping, and contradictory influences [of pop culture]. School life has fragmented into disparate orbits...” (Dimitriadis, 2001, xi). If expressive or assertive performance engages the child into the world of poetry and persuades the child to read and produce poetry, then that emotional act is a positive one. One may not like or admire it or understand it, but the ends justifies the means, in this case, does it not? Slam poems can be filled with sadness, anger, grief—all of the emotions. Spoken word’s hallmark of embracing diversity and allowing cultural expression makes it a conduit for multicultural education—all the rage right now! America as assimilator and cultural suppressionist was so identified by Medina in 2005 as a “toilet bowl”. With an increasingly diverse population and spidering globalization in this world, the swirling waters of the toilet bowl are no longer blending into one homogeneous pool. There is power in the slam poem for teaching nonviolence, leadership, character, individuality, and social change (Bruce and Davis 2000). If writing and performing “loosens the heart” (Ianzito 2008) then slam is a satisfactory approach to encourage self expression and dialogue and encourage the audience to consider what poetry is, what it can represent, and what it can become (Wheeler 2008, 142). Stereotypes can be checked with a tongue in cheek acknowledgment that the trite typecasting for each culture is ridiculous. “Performance is the mode of communication that moves poetry from a quiet experience between a reader and page to an interactive experience between a poet and an audience. (Ellis and Gere 2003). With a growing following and persistence in the canon of poetry, slam can take its place as a bona fide channel for poetry appreciation.

If you need to kiss it,  
Kiss it.  
If you need to kick it,  
Kick it.  
If you need to scream it,  
Scream it.  
But kiss it, kick it, scream it  
Now.

(Marc Kelly Smith)

## **Appendix**

*Selected Anthologies of Children’s Poetry*

Adedjouma, Davida, ed. *The Palm of My Heart : Poetry*. New York: Lee & Low, 1996.

Agardt, John & Grace Nichols, eds. *A Caribbean Dozen: Poems from Caribbean Poets*.  
Cambridge: Candlewick Press, 1998.

- Alarçon, Francisco. *Iguanas in the snow and other winter poems*. San Francisco: Children's Book Press, 2001.
- Alarçon, Francisco. *Laughing Tomatoes and Other Spring Poems*. San Francisco: Children's Book Press, 1997.
- Bruchac, Joseph. *The Earth Under Sky Bear's Feet: Native American Poems of the Land*. New York: Philomel Books, 1995.
- Carlson, Lori. *Cool Salsa : Bilingual Poems On Growing Up Latino In the United States*. New York: Henry Holt, 1994.
- Engle, Margarita. *The Poet Slave of Cuba : A Biography of Juan Francisco Manzano*. New York: Henry Holt, 2006.
- . *The Surrender Tree : Poems of Cuba's Struggle For Freedom*. New York: Henry Holt, 2008.
- Giovanni, Nikki. *Grandfathers : Reminiscences, Poems, Recipes, and Photos of the Keepers of Our Traditions*. New York: Henry Holt, 1999.
- . *Knoxville, Tennessee*. New York: Scholastic, 1994.
- Greenfield, Eloise. *Night on Neighborhood Street*. New York: Puffin, 1996.
- Grimes, Nikki. *A Dime a Dozen*. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, c1998.
- Medina, Jane. *My Name Is Jorge On Both Sides of the River: Poems*. Honesdale, Penn.: Wordsong/Boyd's Mills Press, 1999.
- Merriam, Eve. *The Inner City Mother Goose*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996.
- Myers, Walter Dean. *Harlem*. New York: Scholastic, 1997.
- Nye, Naomi Shihab. *19 Varieties of Gazelle*. New York: Greenwillow, 2002.
- Philip, Neil. *Earth Always Endures: Native American Poems*. New York: Viking, 1996.
- . *Songs Are Thoughts: Poems of the Inuit*. New York: Orchard, 1995.
- Protopopescu, Siyu Liu. *A Thousand Peaks: Poems from China*. Berkeley, CA: Pacific View, 2001.
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<http://www.biblio.com/unbound/2008/5/slam.html>
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- "Francisco X. Alcaron." 2009, *Colorin! Colorado!*  
<http://www.colorincolorado.org/read/meet/alarcon>
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