

The Next Crop of Poets

Don't tell me that the current generation of young people has fried its collective brain with too much screen time. Don't tell me either that teenagers spend their days playing video games, eating Cheetos and wasting time while draining their minds of good old-fashioned creativity. Well, tell me if you must, but be ready for me to prove you wrong.

A couple of weeks ago, my friend Connie and I went to a poetry slam for youth at AS220 to see if it might be a good field trip for the students at the high school where we both work. Turns out that there are a whole bunch of local young people who are cranking out some very well-written and brilliantly performed original poetry. Seems that little old Rhode Island is home to a thriving crop of growing young poets who are bursting into bloom.

I don't know which performance I liked the most. There was a magnetic young man who wove the words *holy*, *queer* and *church* into a poem that was so intense I think I stopped blinking. I know I quit breathing. But then there was the soulful guy who told the audience that it was his first time performing at AS220 before blowing our minds with these two lines: *Six feet below the glass ceiling / Brotha in a box*. And that wasn't even the end of his piece. I won't forget the woman who bled every heart in the place dry with a poem about being used for sex or the other young lady who earned whistles and snaps with a poem about chronic illness.

These young people - ages 14 to 21 - are kicking literary ass. Their command of metaphor, slant rhyme and complicated meter impressed me, as did their style, diction and overall ability to give a riveting performance. I left feeling inspired. I hope I get to take my own students so that they can feel inspired, too.

** AS220 is located at 115 Empire St. in Providence and has a poetry slam for youth, open mic style, on the third Thursday of each month at 8pm. No censorship of language or content.*