

# Black Culture in the Classroom: An interview with educator Phoenix Williams

I recently had the opportunity to interview two amazing educators at the Providence Academy Middle School, Andreana Thomas and Phoenix Williams. This is the second in a two-part series of interviews that will take you on a journey through Black joy, Black culture, educational struggles and more using film, poetry, and education as the tools for success.

Phoenix Williams is an educator at Providence Academy Middle School.

**Damont Combs (Motif):** How are you using art and poetry in your classroom and why is it important?

**Phoenix Williams:** Currently I am teaching an enrichment course on the poetics of hip hop. This course is important for several reasons. Hip hop culture has been diluted over the years, and although it can be a very effective tool for communication, it can also be used as a distraction and can hold young people back from reaching their full potential. It is also important for young people to be able to identify their feelings and emotions in a creative, constructive outlet.

**DC:** How have the students grown learning this art and how have they improved the community?

**PW:** The students have been able to write original haikus, spoken word pieces, and even a limerick or two. We have also put together a Beat Tape that you can check out on our SoundCloud Page, featuring students from our Beat Making Expedition course.

**DC:** What is one lesson you try to teach to every student?

**PW:** One lesson I try to teach every student is that they all have a unique story to share with the world. They matter. They have something worth saying and worth listening to.

**DC:** What is the importance of Black culture and learning that in the classroom?

**PW:** The importance of Black culture in the classroom is something that cannot be understated. For far too long black culture has been left out or villainized in the classroom. It is important for all students of all cultures to understand and appreciate the contributions Black culture has made to the arts and the various fields of education and study.

**DC:** How can we support the school system and help improve the lives of our youth?

**PW:** We all can support the school system by showing an active interest in our scholars. This interview is an excellent example of that. By showing interest and investing in our scholars we all help improve the lives of our young people.

Below is a student-written poem called "Black Joy."

Black Joy

A collaborative poem by D. London, C. Richardson, T. Miller, P. Williams and AF Scholars

sunday dinners at nana's house, arguments with my brother, the smell of my mother in-laws cooking

Black Joy is A FRESH HAIRCUT!

black joy is music arts actors athletes and food

black joy is hopscotch and manhunt

family

black joy is fatherhood

baby hood

black is loud!

black joy is being a big brother

hard working

black joy is family reunions and cook outs

celebrating one another

dancehall music

black joy is what the world needs

shoes

hbcu's

activist

information spreaders

black joy is knowledge!

black joy is art

love

clothes

jobs

taray

black joy magical

black joy is black love

we need more black teachers and doctors