**Performance Poetry – Spoken Word and Slam Poetry**

**Spoken Word:** A form of poetry that is meant to be heard, rather than read. This type of poetry often relies on sound techniques such as alliteration, assonance, and repetition for emphasis. Sometimes there is rhyme, but like most types of poetry, it is not necessary. Many poets create spoken word pieces as a way to express social commentary.

**Poetry Slam**: Competition where poets perform their own work in front of an audience, are judged on their performance, and are given a score from 0-10.

There are many different styles when it comes to spoken word and slam poetry. Some poets choose styles closely associated with hip-hop music (ends up sounding like rap), some shift voices and tones, some are as monotone as possible, and some even include choreography.

Spoken word is an ambiguous and broad term (much like poetry itself); it may include monologues, poems, rap, or stories.

Vancouver has been doing poetry slams since 1996. Every Monday night at Café Deux Soleils on Commercial and every 4th Monday they have Youth Slam (ages 14-22).

The 2010 Winter Olympics placed a spotlight on Vancouver, our country, and our Canadian ways. In the closing ceremonies, William Shatner and Catherine O’Hara joked about rocking canoes and people who are overly quick to apologize. During opening ceremonies, Shane Koyczan told the world that, “We Are More.” What does it mean to be Canadian? What are our Canadian symbols? How do we view ourselves and what shapes our cultural beliefs

**Spoken Word Response**

**Prewriting**: Write down 5 things that ***you*** think define Canada, or being Canadian.

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*We Are More* by Shane Koyczan

*Define Canada.*

*You might say that we are the home of the rocket or the great one*

*who inspired the little nines and the little ninety-nines,*

*but we’re more than the Rockies and the fishing lines off the rocky coast of the Maritimes*

*and some say what defines us is the simple please and thank you*

*and as for you’re welcome, we say that too*

*but we are more than gentile or civilized*

*we are an idea is the process of being realized*

*we are a culture strung together, then woven into a tapestry*

*and the design is what makes us the sum totals of our history*

*we are an experiment going right for a change*

*with influences ranging from a to zed*

*and yes, we say zed. We are the colours of China town and the coffee of Little Italy*

*we dream so big that there are those who would call our ambition an industry*

*because we are vineyards of good year after good year*

*we reforest what we clear because we believe in generations beyond our own*

*knowing now that so many of us have grown past what we used to be, we can stand here with all the hope people have when they say things like someday*

*because we are more than a laundry list of things to do and places to see*

*more than countryside, hills to ski and ponds to skate*

*we are the abandoned hesitation of all those who can’t wait*

*we are first rate, greasy spoon diners and healthy living cafes*

*a country that is all the ways to live*

*a nation that can give you variety because we are choices*

*we are millions upon millions of voices shouting keep exploring*

*we are more*

*we are the surprise the world has in store for you*

*it’s true*

*Canada is the what in what’s new*

*so don’t let your luggage define your travels*

*each life unravels differently*

*and experiences are what make the colours of our tapestry*

*we are the true north strong and free*

*and what’s more is that we didn’t just say it*

*we made it be.*

“We Are More” QUESTIONS

1. Now that you’ve heard a few pieces of spoken word, jot down some of the things you noticed about the piece (music or sounds, devices, style, what did it make you think about?)
2. Would you consider this poetry? Why or why not?
3. **Flip to the next page**; does Shane Koyczan’s recent refusal to perform “We Are More” change your opinion of the spoken word piece? What are your thoughts on Shane’s current stance on his poem?
4. **Paragraph response:** What do you think is the purpose of this piece? What is he trying to say?

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**Consider this…**

On July 1st, 2015, Shane Koyczan posted this on Facebook:

*Every year around May, I start to get inundated with requests to perform "We Are More" for Canada Day. When I originally performed it for the Olympics I felt comfortable because we had not yet strayed so far down this dark path we now find ourselves on. Also the opportunity to perform on a world stage was just too huge to pass up. The problem I have now is that I can't firmly stand behind the poem saying things like "We are an experiment going right for a change." The awful truth is that our cultural identity is undergoing radical plastic surgery, and I'm not sure what country I'm looking at anymore. A country that labels Canadians as second class citizens. A country that kills its research and gags its scientists. A country that refuses to take a serious look into missing aboriginals despite being the same country that killed First Nations children in residential schools... was this nations first attempt at genocide not enough? It's a ridiculous world we live in where we are born within a set of imaginary lines, and that life within those borders is then what defines us to everyone else living inside a different set of imaginary lines. I feel very fortunate to have been born Canadian, but to truly call myself one requires that I participate in making the country a good place. The Canada we have now is run by criminals and big business. Politicians who have the power to vote up their own salaries. Parties who cut social programs, but spend millions of tax dollars on partisan ads trying to convince us that they're doing a good job. We are not "going right for a change"... we are going terribly wrong. I can't participate by offering a poem that suggests everything is okay... it isn't. I will participate by saying that we can do better, and that the standards we place on those we elect need to be elevated. A poem and some fireworks won't fix what's wrong with our country. By all means, spend time with your friends and family. Enjoy the festivities and be proud, but please remember that we have work to do... change does not manifest without our participation. My Canada Day will be at the next election.*