

Practising Hope through Slam Poetry

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Think of an issue you care about. What makes you angry, or passionate about this issue? What should be done about it? Responding to these questions through slam poetry can allow people to express their understandings of contemporary issues that feel too big or difficult to articulate (Muhammad & Gonzales, 2016). As Somers-Willett (2009) notes, slam poetry enables us to “become agents of resistance with hopes of not only surviving the adversities in the world but also working toward self-empowerment and self-determination”.

In the final module of the *He Kaupapa Tūmanako Project Hope* course that Massey University Sociology programme runs for high school students, students engage in the practice of active hope through slam poetry. Professor Elspeth Tilley (playwright at Massey University) guides students through the process of creating poems. Working individually and in groups, students reflect on an issue they care about and creatively articulate what the issue is and why it is an issue, and end with a call to action or vision for change.

Students have written about a range of issues, including climate change, technological change, social media, racism, bullying and inequality. Students often say that this is their favourite part of the course: as one recent graduate noted, “The most memorable aspect of the course for me was definitely when we did the poem activity! I loved talking about world issues and how we carried that message into a poem” (student, Term 1, 2023). Others note that doing this as a group helps them connect over shared experiences: “Writing the poem about bullying with my group it was really great to see us all come together with ideas and talk about what we had been through” (student, Term 1, 2023).

Below is a collection of poems written by students during the 2022, 2023 and 2024 iterations of the course.

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Why did you say that?

Lucca Jordan[†]

Why did you say that?

Was it a slip of the tongue, or a subconscious thought?

Why did you say that?

Were you aware that it could offend me?

Why did you say that?

Have you got no control? Do you know how your words sound?

Why did you say that?

I feel hurt and excluded, discriminated against.

Why did you say that?

How would you feel if someone said that to you?

Why did you say that?

Are you aware of how your racist comments make you look?

Why did you say that?

Are you so insecure that you would take it out on other people?

Why did you say that?

Your words are degrading, spiteful and meaningless. They only reflect your small-mindedness and immaturity.

Why did you say that?

Unless you have something nice to say, your opinion means nothing to me.

Why did you say that?

Racism is the discrimination of people on the basis of their racial or ethnic group.

Why did you say that?

Even the smallest acts of racism can affect people immensely and leave them feeling hurt and insecure.

What can you say about that?

Everyone must make an effort to keep racism out of their community. Shut down a racist comment as soon as you hear it.

[†] **Lucca Jordan** was a student at Long Bay College in Tāmaki Makaurau | Auckland when they wrote this poem.

Life is life

Gauri Ramesh[‡]

Life is like a road
Life can be anything you want it.
So long as you decide the purpose.
It can be long, or it can be short.
It can be easy, or it can be hard.
It can be fair, or it can be harsh.
Yet we chose the way we perceive reality.
The obstacles can be a test of karma.
The gifts can be the results of luck.

Life is like a book
Life can be anything you want it.
So long as you decide the purpose.
Weather you choose to read or scroll
Write or read
Quantity or quality
There is always a possibility.
People come into our lives just to sign out in memory.
While the chapters of guilt fill the pages,
For what seemed like an eternity.
Flipping the pages of days to reveal the number of years.
Another chapter another step into a number of fears.

Life is like a watch
Life can be anything you want it.
So long as you decide the purpose.
Time goes quickly when having a rest
While time strains as you watch the clicks
Seconds fill the time
As hours fill the years
The lost time cannot be rewinded
The time spent with never go back.

[‡] Gauri Ramesh is a student at Long Bay College in Tāmaki Makaurau | Auckland.

So why

Why travel a road with no end?

Why read a book with no truth?

Why wait a time with no change?

Because that's what life is

Life is what we make of it

Life is the light we choose to see at the end of the road,

the end of the book,

the end of the hour,

the end of the tunnel.

Life is filled with so much,

Seek the end, truth and change in all to come

After all, life is life.

“Boys will be boys”

Klara Van Den Berg[§]

Boys in school,
Boys that drool,
Boys are cruel,
Here’s the new rule.
Don’t show skin,
Be super thin,
Be the dream,
This is his scheme.
Don’t touch my hair,
Don’t hold my hand,
Don’t say my name,
This isn’t a game.
Teachers don’t care,
They say it’s rare,
Boys always stare,
No, we’re not a pair,
It was just “a dare”.

“Boys will be boys.” Isn’t an excuse. And no, he doesn’t pick on me because they like me. Stop these sexist comments and jokes, report immediately.

[§] **Klara Van Den Berg** is a student from Paraparaumu College in Pōneke | Wellington.

#SucksToBeYou

*Abby Bleakley***

#SucksToBeYou

Did I do something wrong?

#SucksToBeYou

Everyone says it, maybe it's true?

#SucksToBeYou

We all hear it everyday

#SucksToBeYou

The pressure it causes

#SucksToBeYou

#They'reJustBullies, it's not you, it's them

** **Abby Bleakley** is a student from Palmerston North Girls' High School in Te Papaioea | Palmerston North.

“AI”

*Oscar Wright, Daniel O’Sullivan, Mani Desai, Elise Fouhy, Kuravainga Ngataa,
Kaela Alderson, Shuhan Cao, Elysse Brandon, Connor Menthony and Nao Matsuda*^{††}

Technology has broken us
It tears us apart, taken our lives
Technology has broken us
It has made us addicted, but we can’t stop
Technology has broken us
It’s taken our jobs, ruined the economy
Technology has broken us
It’s taken our art, oh how our heart throbs
Technology has broken us
So, before we lose it all, can we please restart?

^{††} **Oscar Wright, Daniel O’Sullivan, Mani Desai, Elise Fouhy, Kuravainga Ngataa, Kaela Alderson, Shuhan Cao, Elysse Brandon, Connor Menthony and Nao Matsuda** are students from Kuranui College in Māwhera | Greytown, Paraparaumu College in Pōneke | Wellington, Palmerston North Girls’ and Freyberg High Schools in Te Papaioea | Palmerston North, and Rangitikei College in Tutaenui | Marton.

Capitalism and its consequences

Ava Gilbert[#]

Birth, school, work, death
The inescapable cycle of life
Birth, school, work, death
Slaving away for the very knife that kills us
Birth, school, work, death
The endless empty faces echo as one
Birth, school, work, death
Why has everyone stopped looking up?
Birth, school, work, death
The realisation of our hopeless future begins as a dull ache
Birth school work death
Until even the brightest candles have ceased to burn
Birth school work death
Joining hands in solidarity is all we can do

[#] **Ava Gilbert** is a student at Palmerston North Girls' High School in Te Papaioea | Palmerston North.

Social media

Sajani Dissanayake^{ff}

Behind screens, chasing validation in vain
Likes and comments, but they don't ease the pain
Behind screens, chasing validation in vain
Masks of joy, hiding inner disdain
Behind screens, chasing validation in vain
Comparison's grip tightens, driving us insane
Behind screens, chasing validation in vain
Genuine connection beckons, breaking the chain.

^{ff} **Sajani Dissanayake** is a student at Palmerston North Girls' High School in Te Papaioea | Palmerston North.

Behind smiles

*Scarlett Baker, Maitê Abrieu, Alicia Kovacs, Thu Mai, Grace Beissel, Angela Du, Shuhan Cao, Sajani Dissanayake, Max Skates, Stellan Port and Angela Yamamoto****

Behind smiles, declining mental health hits hard,
Hidden cards held close to hearts,
Behind smiles, declining mental health hits hard,
Leaving souls scarred, feeling emotionally marred,
Behind smiles, declining mental health hits hard,
Pressure piles on and on and on...
Behind smiles, declining mental health hits hard,
Sleepless nights with racing thoughts,
Behind smiles, declining mental health hits hard,
It is fine to reach out, we don't judge – there is no need to guard.

*** **Scarlett Baker, Maitê Abrieu, Alicia Kovacs, Thu Mai, Grace Beissel, Angela Du, Shuhan Cao, Sajani Dissanayake, Max Skates, Stellan Port and Angela Yamamoto** are students at Palmerston North Girls' High School in Te Papaioea | Palmerston North, Long Bay College in Tāmaki Makaurau | Auckland, Rangitikei College in Tutaenui | Marton, and Paraparaumu College in Pōneke | Wellington.

A greater feat

Jerry Tran^{†††}

I miss the days where we didn't have to eat in this heat, though, it is a feat that we can eat in this heat.

It is a feat that we can swim in this ocean full of heat with our sweaty, sweaty feet.

It is a feat that we can walk in this heat even with sweat rolling down our backs and down our legs, to our feet.

It is a feat that we can breathe in this

hot,

humid

heat.

It is a feat that we can sleep without rolling in our sheets in this heat,

for the a/c releases no heat inside. Outside, is where the a/c releases all of its heat.

It is a feat to live for as long as we have in this heat, but not a feat if we live no longer than

today,

tomorrow,

and the days after tomorrow in this heat.

It is a feat to uphold the world of our past and perhaps our dreams and,

because we know no miracles,

we cannot

reverse

back

time.

We can only put a stop to this heat in our lives, reflected in our eyes.

The flames have not yet reached our doors, and brought inferno to our dreams, but give it time and the impossible will happen.

How can we live for another day if there is no struggle to survive, no struggle to achieve the feat not ever achieved before – the feat to stop our world from burning into flames as

one mind,

one body,

and

one soul?

Yes, it is a feat to live and adapt to this heat, but would it not be a greater feat if we as one were to stop this heat?

^{†††} **Jerry Tran** is a student at Long Bay College, in Tāmaki Makaurau | Auckland.

In the minds of too many

Francesca Haddon^{##}

In the minds of too many, a checklist resides.
A prism through which others are defined
But in these checkboxes, our truths are denied
And culture is left behind.

A brush too broad paints colour too dull
Reducing vibrant hues
I am smothered in grey

While constantly being reminded of the heritage to which I lay claim
I struggle in settings when I'm prompted to say
Where I'm from, my culture, who I am
I want to be proud
But stereotypes and expectations
Pull
Me
Back
Am I an imposter? Do I look like I belong? I need to prove it

Tugging at my shirt
Looking at the floor
I run through the list, hoping I can check boxes
When I know they don't define
Who I am.
Or who I think I need to be

^{##} **Francesca Haddon** is a student at Long Bay College, in Tāmaki Makaurau | Auckland.

References

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