

# Poetry Slams the Roaring Fork Valley

by Jennie Trejo

The month of February has been dedicated to revealing the inner poet in students all across the Roaring Fork School District (RFSD). Poet, DJ, and performance artist Logan “Dirtyverbs” Phillips is back again this year, and this time he brought along poet, emcee, teaching artist, and friend Myrlyn Hepworth to help him teach students one of the most intimate forms of expression: poetry.

For the last couple of weeks, Phillips and Hepworth have been taking time out of their days to perform their poetry and teach workshops at all of the schools in the district, which includes Basalt, Carbondale, and Glenwood Springs. Many of these students have never been exposed to poetry in this manner before.

“Kids usually have no idea what to expect when we take the stage,” Phillips said. “They’re almost expecting to be bored, and so when they hear our poems, which are meant to be heard out loud and often sound more like hip hop than traditional poetry, it can be very powerful and eye-opening.”

After the opening stand-up performance, students are allowed to sign up a the workshop in which they are given an opportunity work one-on-one with the two guests. The message that they try to portray is that poetry is something useful to everyone, and that there is power in learning one’s own voice.

One student, senior Yaqui Arreola, was happily surprised by her experience in the workshop.

“I wasn’t expecting as much instruction as we got,” Arreola said. “It gave me time to sit down and just write. Even though we didn’t really know anyone else in the room it was a comfortable enough environment to want to share what I wrote. I put a lot of emotion into my poem, and even though I never thought I would share it. I ended up feeling a lot better after I did. There was a lot of encouragement.”

This isn’t Phillips’ first experience working with children. He mostly works with high schoolers although he did visit middle schools as well.

“I’m surprised by students everyday. Sometimes there are students who seem completely disconnected or uninterested to what I’m doing, but on the inside they’re actually soaking up everything I’m saying. Sometimes it’s the quietest students that surprise me the most.”

Phillips taught literature in Cuernavaca, Mexico for a few semesters before taking time off to pursue art full-time.

“Education has always been an important part of being an artist for me,” Phillips said. “I believe that the job of the poet is not just to write verse, but to create more space for verse in the world. I think that one of the ways to create more space for poetry is to open space for young people to play with words.”

Phillips was originally discovered by GSHS Band Director Tami Suby. Suby is the one who made the move to bring Phillips in and have him perform at the school. Last year was his first year performing and teaching in the Roaring Fork Valley.

This year, Phillips and Hepworth took their community involvement a step further and teamed up with the Aspen Writers Foundation to put on the biggest youth poetry slam that the Roaring Fork Valley has seen. It took place on Feb. 10 at the PAC 3 in Carbondale.

“The poetry slam was exactly the vision I had last year,” Suby said. “How often do high school students get to stand on that special stage and shout what they have to say?”

It was a huge success, with 32 students from six different middle and high schools in the valley taking the stage and sharing their own personal creative works.

“I was worried that no one would show up,” Phillips joked, “but there was such great turnout. This was the first poetry slam, but we don’t want it to be the last.”

The slam revolved around audience involvement, with volunteer judges. Six students were then selected to perform in Aspen at the Wheeler Opera House on Thursday Feb. 13 with Phillip, Hepworth and another poet from New York, Lemen Andersen.

“The most rewarding thing is being able to see someone who has never even considered writing to be a valid outlet take the microphone and receive approval from their peers,” Phillips said. “The moment someone discovers the power of their own voice is a really beautiful and life-changing moment.”



Logan “Dirtyverbs” Phillips hosted the biggest Poetry Slam that the Roaring Fork Valley has ever seen. The event was held at the PAC3 Center in Carbondale. *Photo by Jennie Trejo*



Poetry workshops were held during three different periods at GSHS on Friday Feb. 14. Phillips introduces himself and becomes acquainted with a few of the students. *Photo by Jennie Trejo*

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