



## **The Edmonton Poetry Festival**

### ***Verse Project***

**Bringing poets in to the school for an afternoon of poetry and language**

#### **Who we are**

The Verse Project is dedicated to working with students and teachers to help establish a lifelong interest in poetry and the literary arts. Our program helps students learn to love words and increases literacy. We help them explore their own unique voice and how it can be used in poetry.

The Edmonton Poetry Festival, Poets in The School Program, was established in 2006 and until now was available only during the poetry festival week. Each festival week we host roughly 15 poetry workshops, bringing poetry to nearly 500 students per year. That's approximately 3500 students who have been engaged in poetry since we began. It is time to expand and offer this program to those students who have been unable to access it during festival week. Teachers have asked us to provide workshops at other times of the year to fit with their curriculum needs.

Now named the *Edmonton Poetry Festival Verse Project*, we are committed to bringing Edmonton City Schools a year round poetry workshop program beginning October 2013. Our poets run workshops, give performances and engage with youth on "their" level. We want to help your students fall in love with language.

#### **Why a school program?**

By bringing poetry into classrooms, students meet face to face with writers who can convey the pleasures of creating and sharing poems. Teachers learn tips and techniques they can use with their classes in the future. We build connections. We build bridges in literary communities that we hope will continue long after the poet leaves the building.

Our poets help bridge the distance for teachers and instill a love and respect for the art form with students. Poetry is an ever evolving art form and our poets can help engage students in these new forms. Poetry is exciting and relevant.

The growing popularity of poetry slams and rap (rhythm and poetry) demonstrate the appeal that poetry has for adolescents. Spoken Word Poetry is contemporary and stimulating right now. It all has to start somewhere - with the written word. Our poets

engage youth in using language in a way that is fun and that fits with their interests. We help bring this style of poetry to students without you having to be an expert in spoken word.

Poetry can also illuminate other parts of the curriculum. We have had poets visit music and drama classes, social studies classes, science classrooms and social justice clubs. Creative connections benefit all subjects and the study of language is vital to critical thinking.

## **How it Works**

The Verse Project works with poets who can appeal to students from a range of cultures and poetic genres. Participating poets are professionally published and have been selected by The Verse Project programming committee. We do our best to match poets who can relate to the ages and particular needs of the schools and students.

We look for schools where there is a commitment to literacy, where the visiting poets will be welcomed and classes well prepared in advance. We ask for teachers who will stay in the class during the poets' visit, so the teacher can continue the engagement after we leave. We also ask for feedback after the festival on how things went. You'll be given a link to a survey to complete after we visit your classroom so that we can learn how best to work with you. *We like to send feedback to our poets from your students.* So please keep in touch with us!

Our poets will join you for one class block and will tailor a visit depending on the age of the students and the classroom visited. The poets will perform some of their own poems and lead students through some writing exercises. Again much will depend on the classroom visited.

\$150.00 brings one poet into your classroom for one period or block. Sometimes poets perform in pairs. We can accommodate more than one poet in the classroom at the cost of \$150.00 per poet.

Do you want them to present to more than one class? They can and they have. We charge \$250.00 per poet for larger workshops or assemblies.

We want to share this opportunity with as many schools as possible and we know how tight budgets can be these days. Please contact us if the \$150.00 fee is a hardship and we will try and work with you to get a poet in your school. Just email the office at [info@edmontonpoetryfestival.com](mailto:info@edmontonpoetryfestival.com).

We are committed to learning as well. If something isn't working, tell us so we can make revisions to the program.

## Who we work with

Edmonton has a wealth of published poets and writers. We work with local authors that have presented workshops or worked with children and teens before. All of our poets are vetted by our programming committee. Poets come from a variety of backgrounds and we work with poets from all genres – From children's poets to spoken word and slam poets.

Our workshops are designed around your classroom. We send poets that match your needs so we like to get as much information as possible about your class when you book. Once you contact us we will work with you to get all the data needed so that you and your students have a successful experience.

Some of our past poets include:

- **Bob Holman**, New York's 'poetry czar'
- Canadian slam champions **Ian Keteku** and **Brendan McLeod**
- Halifax poet laureate (and YouTube phenomenon) **Tanya Davis**
- Edmonton current poet laureate **Mary Pinkoski**
- Award winning multi genre writer and children's author **Shelley Leedhal**
- Past Edmonton laureate and award winning poet **Anna Marie- Sewell**

## Words from a student

"Being a young writer comes with a lot of uncertainty and excessive experimenting. By being given the opportunity to meet writers from an assortment of different subject areas and genres, a youth who is either dabbling or neck-high in words is then able to really solidify the art-form to themselves. At least, that's what it was like for me. By being exposed to all the different types of poetry and general mediums of writing, my world was blown. Specifically meeting and getting to work with poets who are published and are in their adulthood, but still writing, just gave me an extra confidence boost in my own potential. It is one thing reading about poets and their general careers and lives, but it's another thing meeting one and actually getting to work with one. I am overjoyed that I was given this opportunity throughout my schooling and hope that many others get the same opportunity." --- **Harleen Cheema**

For information about The Verse Project, please contact the executive director, Rayanne Doucet, at [rayanne@edmontonpoetryfestival.com](mailto:rayanne@edmontonpoetryfestival.com)