

Poetry Slam

*Prairie Elementary School
Naperville, Illinois*

Prairie Elementary School’s Learning Resource Center (LRC) was transformed into a coffeehouse, with tablecloths and lights decorating each table. The overhead lights were dimmed, and bright lights focused on a stage. One by one, students from kindergarten to fifth grade went on stage to recite a poem, either one that they had written or one out of a book from a popular poet, such as Shel Silverstein. At the end of each reading, students received warm applause.

The parents on the Student Family Community Partnership (SFCP) Committee hired an emcee who began the evening by performing one of his own poems. Then, he described slam poetry to the audience, which is essentially performance poetry with an emphasis on feeling and expression. Five students and parents from the audience volunteered as judges and rated the poetry performances from 1 to 10. At the end of the evening, there was a four-way tie for the best score.

Prairie Elementary School’s Poetry Slam involved parents in a school event to support literacy—a school improvement goal. The school had organized a traditional poetry night the year before, but wanted to do something more creative this year.

The SFCP Committee met with the principal to receive approval for the event. Parents arranged for a speaker, photography, custodian services, room set-up, refreshments, and other tasks. They devised a communication plan to get the word out about the upcoming Poetry Slam. They also requested that the LRC director work with the students on poetry during the school day. SFCP Committee members

paid for the event with a grant from the Naperville Education Fund and funds from Prairie’s Home and School Association.

The Poetry Slam received a lot of positive feedback. Students and parents found the emcee to be funny and energetic. “The evening was an opportunity for kids to share enthusiasm and was a supportive environment,” said a parent. Prairie’s Poetry Slam sparked students’ interest in reading poetry and speaking in front of a group.

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