

## Whitney's Coffee House/Poetry Night

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*Whitney M. Young School  
Cleveland, Ohio*

**A**spiring poets rhymed their way deeper into their parents' hearts last February, during the Whitney M. Young School's Coffee House/Poetry Night.

The school's family liaison came up with the idea to involve parents and children in an enjoyable, non-stressful activity outside of the classroom. It was also intended to further the school's goal of improving students' reading and writing.

The liaison helped the school's English teachers plan a poetry reading for students in grades 8 to 12, following a unit they taught on poetry. In these classes, teachers encouraged students to write their own poems on topics of their choice. At the end of the unit, teachers asked students to participate in the poetry reading, sending home permission slips with interested students.

The school used fliers, newsletters, and e-mails to publicize the poetry reading—a first for the Young school.

On the evening of the event, teachers and staff transformed the school's media center into a coffee house, reminiscent of Beat generation hangouts. They decorated the tables with cloths and centerpieces and hung student artwork on the walls. The coffee house menu offered sandwiches, pastries, coffee and punch for the 5:30 to 7 p.m. event. About 60 parents and community members attended, and 34 students participated by reading their original poems on relationships, family life, religion, and other topics.

"Students were able to express themselves and actually be themselves," said Ms. Wright, commenting on one of the many benefits of the reading.

At the end of the night, the audience gave the young poets a standing ovation. The adults were thrilled to see how creative the students could be. "They loved it," the liaison commented. Many parents were sad that they did not have copies of the students' poems

to keep, and they encouraged the teachers to publish them in a book.

The refreshments cost about \$200—the only expense for this project. The school covered these costs with money from the school budget.

The school plans to make the poetry reading an annual event. Next year it wants to expand the reading to involve all students, grades 6 to 12, and plans to schedule the poetry unit earlier in the school year.

To encourage other schools, the liaison said simply, "Just do it. It was a wonderful practice and everyone loved it."

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