

KEY STAGE	AGE
EYFS	3-5
KS1	5-7
KS2	7-11
KS3	11-14 ✓
KS4	14-16 ✓
KS5	16-18

AT A GLANCE

- IDENTITY
- SOCIETY
- RHYME
- METAPHOR
- PERFORMANCE

POETRYCLASS: FRESH IDEAS FOR POETRY LEARNING FROM THE POETRY SOCIETY

IDENTITY AND PERFORMANCE POETRY

Samilah Naira's poem *Denied of Identity* was one of the six winners of SLAMBassadors 2013, the Poetry Society's annual performance poetry championship. Judges Joelle Taylor, Bea Colley and Hollie McNish chose Samilah and the other SLAMBassadors from over 400 performances by 12-18 year olds. As SLAMBassadors, the young poets benefit from intensive masterclasses with Joelle Taylor, ongoing professional development and a showcase at London's Southbank Centre.

Watch Samilah's poem here:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3h8DI2RBDw

Slam is the competitive art of performance poetry before a loud and lively audience. Performance poetry shares many features with traditional 'page' poetry, such as metaphor and rhyme – they are not separate types of writing. However, performance poetry tends to have a particular emphasis on the sound of words, using frequent and obvious rhyme and half-rhyme, and the impassioned style of delivery particularly suits political themes and issues surrounding identity. Indeed, 'Identity' is the theme of SLAMBassadors each year.

Denied of identity

Samilah's poem deals with the many pressures young women face to look, think and act in the 'right' way. She argues that female individuality is manipulated by larger forces – technology, media, society.

Listen to the poem with your students and get them to list the aspects of modern technology which distort girls' sense of self-image. How do computers, TV and pop culture influence the way we think? Can they think of any further examples – for instance, how has the internet affected the way people behave and interact with the outside world?



Samilah's poem speaks on behalf of young women – students might like to consider the pressures young men face, too. Are these different?

Magazines and manipulation

In expressing her anger over the way modern society constructs female identity, Samilah uses some of the language of female magazines: "be *you*", "have the perfect figure". With your students, look through some teenage magazines and pick out phrases and ideas which regularly crop up. What do these magazines assume girls are interested in?

Then, using Samilah's poem as a starting-point, get your students to compile a list of magazine headings which would encourage young women's development and self-esteem.

Glass bottles and instruction manuals

Samilah uses a wide range of metaphors to express her ideas about identity. With the class, discuss Samilah's imagery and how she deepens her argument using metaphor. What does it mean to say that women's brains are made into computers, their bodies are etched glass bottles, and they come with instruction manuals?

Encourage your students to come up with their own metaphor for a young person's individuality and / or body. It could be anything – snowflake, boat, animal... Get them to write down the ways in which their metaphor represents an individual's identity. For example, a spider spins its own totally unique web which it needs to survive; this web is strong and keeps the spider high and out of danger, but it is also vulnerable to attack; a spider's silk helps it fly through the air; if a web is destroyed, the spider builds another one. You could string these metaphors together to create a collaborative class poem.



The power of words

To enhance the power of her poem, Samilah uses forceful rhymes and half-rhymes such as "victim / religion / wind", "shatter / pressure / figure" and "individuality / society / insanity / personality / insecurity / melody". Note with your students how words like "shatter" and "pressure" don't look the same, but echo each other when heard aloud. All the rhymes in Samilah's poem help bind it together, and give her work a music which makes it satisfying to listen to.

Get your students to write their own poem on the theme of identity, with an emphasis on internal rhyme and half-rhyme – it doesn't have to be at the ends of the lines, necessarily. Students could use Samilah's rhyming words to create a framework for their own poems, or you could come up with a set of rhyming words as a class (you could also use a rhyming dictionary or a website like www.rhymezone.com) and use these.

When you have your class set of poems, encourage students to perform them with lots of feeling.

To find out more about SLAMBassadors UK, please visit www.poetrysociety.org.uk/slam