

An Evaluation of the *Get Lit* Youth Poetry Program

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Introduction: The Aims of the *Get Lit* Program.

In 2011, we observed four 12-week classes of the Get Lit – Words Ignite youth poetry program in urban Los Angeles. Many of the students had dropped out of school and were attending independent study programs to re-engage and earn high school diplomas. What we learned about the operation and goals of the program at that time has carried forward in most respects to how the program functions now – and with good reason. Get Lit had shown very positive effects on the students involved, both on their language and poetic skills and also on their beliefs about their own abilities. As we compare the results in this 2014 study of more than 200 students in ten Get Lit programs, most of the earlier findings continue to resonate.

The Get Lit program

The *Get Lit* youth poetry course of study is about language. It is about putting feeling and lived lives into words in ways that declarative sentences can fail to achieve. The poet expresses thoughts and views in ways that may reveal the mind of the author as the words were penned. A poem at very least suggests the poet's thoughts and motivations. The poet uses phrases we admire or that tweak our feelings, for reasons we may scarcely sense. And perhaps most important, the poet conjures ideas that can reveal to the reader his or her own mind, and

Get Lit – Words Ignite 2014 Evaluation

with a new language that allows and encourages exploration and self-understanding.

Watching *Get Lit* classrooms has meant watching youth encounter, and sometimes collide with, works of classic poetry. Langston Hughes and Walt Whitman and Maya Angelou and T. S. Elliot. These and other names begin as vaguely familiar or virtually unknown words to sixteen year-olds. Discovering that there are real people behind these names sets a stage for discovering stories about poets' lives and communities and friends and families; their dreams and fears; their champions and detractors. It's about hearing the beautiful or haunting ring of words, perhaps for the first time. It's wondering about how *so few* chosen words can say so much. It's about how the quiet between words can say as much as the words themselves.

With a little personal attention and encouragement, youth begin to glimpse that they too have things they could write about in their own lives, and that poetry could be an interesting and even exciting way to do this. Poetry? Exciting? Well, observing classes, listening to parents, and reading what students write about this course suggest that excitement is surely an apt characterization of this experience.

The curriculum design embraces a well-founded learning principle, namely that acquiring knowledge is largely a matter of connecting the new information and experience to what is already known. This is a key element of the *Get Lit*

classes. Each student gravitates to a specific classic poem and poet. The poem they choose provides an inspiration for a piece of original work by the student. Since students have selected and worked with a poem that has meaning for themselves, they are poised to think and to write in response to their poems. More than poised, the students are typically highly motivated to put their own pens to paper and try this business called poetry. Some have written poems before, but none reports being immersed in a world of poets and poetry while giving attention to their own work.

What seems on the mind of the classical poet prompts questions and reactions from the student – why is this important to me? Does it provoke questions I have about myself and my life? Or my own beliefs? Or does it offer suggestions to me? Do I have critical reactions to the work? Why would these be important? And for all these realms, are there poetic ways I can express myself, even ways that are inspired by the craft and expression of the original poet? Should something rhyme here? Why do these words sound so much better than what I first wrote? Should I address *this* before *this*? *GL* teachers bounce questions back to unsuspecting students. This class is about making it *you*. Making it *true*. Not so much about getting it *right* in a traditional classroom guessing-game. *Own your words and you can own your life!*

Get Lit also encourages students to collaborate in writing and performing poems as part of the class.

With occasional hitches and conflicts to work out, group writing and performing becomes an experience in group creativity and group performance in which students discover things about themselves and others. When we learn things that are hard won, or to which we assign great importance, the feelings of competence we gain are that much more important, and are that much more likely to spill over to general beliefs about our ability, our agency, and our sense of efficacy.

This is a positive story. It's good for the kids who are its stars, for the families longing for their children to bond to the education society manages to steer their way, and for the teachers finding a means to connect with today's teens. Let's turn to how the story played in 2014 in a large cast of students.

Testing the Story of *Get Lit*, 2014

Methods

For this work, we draw information from surveys completed before and after *Get Lit* classes by about 200 students in 10 *Get Lit* classes. This represents a three-fold increase beyond the student sample we used in 2011.

This study depends solely on surveys that gauge personal growth and changes in beliefs between the start and end of their classes. Copies of the pre- and post- surveys are appended to this report. This is a smaller-scale assessment of these classes than we pursued in 2011. For that first study, we had research

assistants attend all four participating classes regularly, and the entire team attended the final performance involving all four classes at one of the larger centers -- where in addition to the 60 or so performers, nearly 300 parents, friends, and media representatives were on hand in spring 2011. This year, we attended the Classic Slam in Los Angeles at the Wilshire Ebel Theatre, where students from many of the high schools represented in this study competed. And the P.I. of this study served as a judge in the finals.

The survey data provide a good look at how the students evolved over the experience, their specific reactions to the program, advice they have for their teachers, and their plans to continue writing poems.

Our Survey Instrument

We enlisted a pair of pre- and post-survey/tests that students completed at the start and end of the 12-week course. This survey included topical background and experience questions, scaled questions related to student motivation, and open-response items asking students to appraise various aspects of their classes – such as what important things they had learned about themselves, what they felt about writing and performing poetry, and their plans for the future.

We report content and frequency analyses of student responses to the background and self-descriptive questions. We used four specific questions to provide indications whether or not student

Get Lit – Words Ignite 2014 Evaluation

motivation and/or opinions changed between the start and end of the course, and possibly because of participation in the course.

Who are the Get Lit Students?

Pre-survey. The pre-survey asks *Get Lit* students background questions that portray the study population on familiar characteristics and also their prior experiences with poetry. We show these data in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Get Lit – Words Ignite 2014 [and 2011] Student Background/Pre-Survey Information		
	2014	[2011]
Female	N=186 65%	N=63 60%
Male	35%	40%
Mean Age	15.1	16.5
Mean Grade Level	9.8	10.6
Ever written a Poem?		
<i>More than one</i>	54%	51%
<i>One</i>	43%	29%
<i>Never</i>	3%	21%
How Important Has Poetry Been to you in the past?	Pre-	Pre-
I'm not familiar with poetry	11%	10%
I've read some poetry	44%	37%
I enjoy reading poetry	37%	32%
I read and enjoy poetry frequently	8%	21%

**Figure 2: Students' Favorite Poets,
Pre- and Post- Program**

Favorite Poets at Program's Start (N=89)	
N	Poet
27	Edgar Allen Poe
14	Theodor Seuss Geisel
12	Shel Silverstein
8	Emily Dickinson
5	Robert Frost
3	Maya Angelou
3	Tupac Shakur
2	Sylvia Plath
2	Alfred Lord Tennyson
2	Walt Whitman
1	Charles Bukowski
1	Langston Hughes
1	Pablo Neruda
1	Biggie Smalls
1	Sarah Kay
1	William Shakespeare
1	Henry David Thoreau
1	Tim Burton
1	T.S. Eliot
1	Alice Walker
1	Oscar Wilde

Get Lit – Words Ignite 2014 Evaluation

Favorite Poets at Program's End (N=151)	
N	Poet
21	Edgar Allen Poe
14	Theodor Seuss Geisel
11	Shel Silverstein
11	Maya Angelou
9	Jimmy Santiago Baca
8	Tupac Shakur
8	Langston Hughes
6	Robert Frost
6	Emily Dickinson
5	Walt Whitman
5	Robert Browning
4	William Shakespeare
4	John Lennon
4	Charles Bukowski
2	William Wordsworth
2	Mary Oliver
2	Naomi Shihab Nye
2	Jim Morrison
2	Lawrence Ferlinghetti
2	ee cummings
1	Yevgeniy Yevtushenko
1	Williams
1	George Watsky
1	Tyler the Creator
1	Anne Sexton
1	Carl Sandburg
1	Sylvia Plath
1	Tim Minchin
1	Claude McKay
1	Margaret Walker
1	Malcom X
1	Mac Miller
1	Paul Laurence Dunbar
1	Katherine Larson
1	Shane Koyczan
1	Ted Kooser
1	Samuel Johnson
1	Kurt Cobain
1	classmates
1	Lewis Carroll
1	Gwendolyn Brooks
1	Emily Bronte
1	Amy Lowell

Get Lit – Words Ignite 2014 Evaluation

Get Lit students in this study were generally in the middle of their high school programs – between 16 and 17 years old and about half way through the tenth grade. And about 60 percent were female, 40 percent male.

Participating students came to this class with some experience with poetry. About 80 percent had written at least one poem before and just over half had written more than one poem. Only about a fourth of the students had ever performed a poem – recited a work in front of some sort of audience. Most did not name a favorite poet at the start of *Get Lit*; for those who had a favorite poet, commonly mentioned names are shown on page 5. As the program began, many of these poets showed up as selections studied by the students.

What we learned from the post-program student surveys.

Our post-program survey (a copy is appended) asked students to describe various things they learned during the program. The survey also asked particular questions related to aspects of student motivation, questions that were repeated from the pre-program student survey. We are able to capture changes or growth in student motivation through this design, as we present in Figure 10. (It is more accurate to say that these questions provide modest indicators of student motivation – we enlisted questions standard in the psychological literature, but we did not approach this work with a full battery of multi-item scales as we might in a rigorous research trial).

Performing classical poetry. An initial activity in each class was having students listen to, read, and select a work of an established contemporary or historic poet. And then to memorize a poem or section for presentation to the class. The performing aspect of the *Get Lit* course is central – it forces students to attend to classic poetry, to learn the words, and explore their meaning. Having to recite poetry in meaningful and expressive ways, an explicit goal within the class, is a powerful incentive to attend to the work. So we asked students about the meaning or importance of poetry performance after they had completed the class.

Figure 3 – Post-survey response to Question 3	
If Performing Classical Poetry is Important to you, please state why?	Pct. Response
Practicing self-expression	24.5%
Connecting to poets, to the poem, and to other generations.	24.5%
Practicing public speaking, performing, gaining confidence, memorizing, and / or not being shy	18.6%
Learning about other points of view, learning to express how others feel.	17.6%
Learning about the author and history, learning to interpret poems	14.7%
<i>N=102 of 186</i>	

Shown in Figure 3, the leading student responses about the importance of performing poetry were the opportunities for self-expression and for connecting poets to their poems and other generations. Advancing skills for public speaking was also cited, along with learning to express how others feel. Students also report that performing is fun and that it helps with self-understanding.

Performing their own poetry. We then turned to this question: What about performing your own poetry? This step followed immersion in classical poetry. Students wrote their own poems – mainly responses to the classical works they had studied, learned, and performed. Students then performed their responses along with the original poems that had inspired them.

Figure 4 - Post-survey response to Question 4	
If Performing <u>Your Own</u> Poetry is Important to you, please state why?	Pct. Response
Practicing self-expression	64.6%
Sharing my ideas, showing who I am	24.3%
Practicing public speaking, performing, gaining confidence, not being shy	6.9%
Helps with Writing	.
<i>N=144 of 186</i>	

Not surprisingly, student responses loaded heavily in two areas. The first was the power of their own poetry in expressing themselves. Students gravitated over the course to more searching and thoughtful regard for their personal takes on their classic poets and ways to convey their responses effectively.

Students also felt that the performance aspect of the class generated pride in the simple accomplishment of performing. This too seems a natural consequence of the class. Students learned to do something they had largely never done, and they learned (based on our end-of-class observations) to perform with good skills. And they received positive feedback from peers and teachers in doing this. Pride of accomplishment follows.

Students learning about themselves. We also asked students what they learned about themselves in the process. Since teachers stressed some personal searching and thought in student responses to classical poetry, students typically traversed some territory of self-understanding in the process. Student responses to this question, shown in Table 4, were directed to topical matters of self-understanding (they learned things about themselves from expressing themselves) and also to their learning that they had abilities they had not recognized before – the ability to express, the ability to write poetry, the ability to think better. And through it all, they report gaining confidence.

Figure 5: What is one important thing you learned about yourself that you learned in this class. (Capture this carefully.)	
<i>N</i>	<i>Category</i>
53	I have the ability to perform, to be artistic, to memorize, and / or to speak publicly
35	I built my confidence and / or I overcame shyness
24	I can write poetry
23	I can express myself
19	Writing and / or performing are difficult for me
18	I enjoy poetry and / or performing
10	Other
9	Nothing / I dislike poetry
191 students responded.	

Figure 6: What is another important thing you learned about yourself that you learned in this class?	
<i>N</i>	<i>Category</i>
32	I built my confidence, I overcame shyness, and / or I can express myself
27	I have the ability to perform, to be artistic, to memorize, and / or to speak publicly
25	Writing and / or performing are difficult for me
23	I have a new perspective on poetry and / or I enjoy poetry
13	I can write poetry
120 students responded.	

The very positive student reactions to learning and performing and composing poetry as the main elements of this class (Figures 5, 6, and 7) lead fairly seamlessly to their expectation for the immediate future. More than 90 percent of students reported that they would continue writing poems after the class (66 percent) or probably continue writing poems (26 percent), as shown in Table 5. Figure 6 is a continuation Figure 5, and Figure 7 shows actual student quotes about their self-learning.

Figure 7
**Student quotes: What I've
learned about myself:**

I learned:

"how deep my writing can be"
"I hide my emotions too much"
"get upset when people critique me"
"go deep and express what not seen"
"have passion and can write"
"to be brave"
"I like poetry"
"I can write poetry"
"people actually hear what I want to say"
"able to speak in front of a crowd"
"comfortable expressing myself with poetry"
"it's going to be in my future"

"empowered when I speak"

"poetry is not my thing"

"opened many new doors"
"ok to feel vulnerable"

And students enthusiastically support the idea that their schools (or other education programs) offer the Get Lit class in the future, shown in Figure 8. Most students said yes to this question. More than 90 percent said yes or probably yes to the idea of offering the class in the future.

Figure 8: Should Get Lit Offer this Poetry Program in Additional Schools

Yes – 60%
Probably – 28 %
Perhaps – 11 %

202 Responses

Figure 9: Will You Continue to Write Poetry in the Future?

Yes – 26%
Probably – 33%
Maybe – 28%
No – 8%

202 Responses

As shown in Figure 9, about 60 percent of students anticipate writing poetry in the future after completing Get Lit classes. Another 28 percent indicated that they might do so.

Growth in Student Motivation.

We used a standard strategy for exploring student motivation in this study, although an abbreviated one. Experiences that promote gains in personal competence may contribute to growth in an individual's more general sense of ability and confidence. In the reports above, students showed various ways in which they felt that Get Lit contributed to enhanced competency. These competencies included ability to write poetry, the ability to understand themselves better, and abilities to think and express.

Accompanying these developments, students report more general gains in confidence in themselves.

These areas lie in the domain of *achievement motivation* – an area of development focused on self-confidence, self-concept, beliefs in one’s self-efficacy and agency, beliefs that one’s efforts matter, and the roles of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to act in particular ways. Motivation is an important potential area of effect for a program like Get Lit because visible student accomplishment is at the heart of the work and tangible accomplishment in the midst of one’s peers, teachers, and friends and family can have dramatic influences on anyone.

Aspects of motivation status and growth are typically estimated from individual responses to a battery of questions. A set of 5 or 6 questions might probe self-efficacy beliefs, for example. And other sets of questions are each directed to other facets of motivation.

For this study, we kept our motivation assessment brief, because of our needs to collect information in several domains and in a relatively short period of time. We wanted to keep the overall process to about 20 minutes in each survey administration; our past experiences suggest that interest and attention to in-class surveys such as ours can be fragile. We used paired individual questions to explore each of the developments shown in Figure 10; that is, we compared student answers to each question on the post-survey with answers to the same questions on the pre-survey. And we average all student responses on each pre- versus post- question to assess change.

Figure 10

Figure 11: Student Motivation Scale Results				
	Pre-score	Post-score	Growth	Significant?
Academic Self-Concept (I think I am doing pretty well in scho	3.45	3.88	0.43	Yes
Fluency with problem-solving ideas	3.92	3.97	0.05	trace
Luck and chance account for most individual success.	3.89	3.68	0.21	Yes*
Hard work is the most important thing for success.	3.59	4.39	0.8	Yes

* Reverse scale: Lower score indicates less belief about luck or chance being important for success.

Positive program associations with motivation indicators. Figure 10 shows significant positive growth between average pre- and post- motivation measures for the 202 program students in the ten *Get Lit* classes. The table points to these by showing pre- and post- scale scores, an indication of whether or not there was growth, (i.e. positive change between specific pre- and post-scores), and statistical significance indications.

These scores reflect academic self-concept, fluency with problem-solving ideas, the role of luck in success (i.e. non-dependence on luck for success, and the importance of hard work for success. The results are impressive, but the growth is not surprising given the duration and intensity of the *Get Lit* experience. They are not surprising first because of what we have seen in the program over the past four years through observations and what students write about their experiences in their post-surveys and in our conversations with students after final performances. A number of things in the program simply work, at least for a majority of students. And where student motivation is concerned, composing and performing poetry in a public space, when done well, can be seen to be uplifting in many ways for the students. They have learned to do something they have never done before; they receive supportive feedback from teachers, their peers, and audiences. Feeling better about yourself and your school experiences are natural correlates.

For some students, *Get Lit* was a primary focus for participants over the time of the 12-week class. This intensive design is rare in regular schools where students study several subjects at once, and where experimental studies attached to a curriculum are typically embedded a varied array of non-related student pursuits.

Student postscripts to their *Get Lit* teachers.

We affixed a simple question to the post- survey.

Any message or messages for your teacher(s) in this class?

On the following page, in Figure 11, we show the entire inventory of comments. Sixty-four of the students wrote in response to this question. The comments show a lot of praise and endearment for their *Get Lit* teachers, and for Diane Luby Lane, the program director and principal teacher. The students had been writing poetry for three months; while do not have a pre-measure on this, these comments show a lot of feeling and passion. These seem to symbolize the character and quality of the program in the minds of students.

As teachers during a substantial part of our professional lives, CRoC staff members would eagerly welcome comments such as these about our teaching efforts.

Figure 11

Table 11: Final student messages for their Get Lit teachers	
thanks for creative writing class	full course on teaching how to write a poem
Thanks for help to expand as writer	have Get Lit for entire school
don't change anything	to present to classes & practice with mic
thanks for being awesome	give choice whether to share & participate own poetry
Thanks	see teachers perform some poetry
thnks for letting us show our talent	let kids write more to express & learn about selves
techer was amazing	wish could performed front of class more
thank you	didn't enjoy this class very much.
Thanks I enjoyed a lot	hello
now I know what I want out of life	project stressful but thanks sorensen making me present
teachers w/connection to students impact our lives	this class fun, do it again next yr
get this more well known,	keep up the good work
you are great teacher & taught me lots I didn't know	Get Lit best part of class
awesome job teaching & coaching	hi and hello to all teachers
thank you Ms Thomas	thanks! Great exper.
love you all!	if I perform again, I will notify Get Lit
thrilled at Get Lit & thanks for glorious opportunity	do very good at teaching
hard work! Nopain no gain!	thanks for helping me do good in school
should be offered increases skills,open minds,& fun	ms thomas good job, thanks for this experience
ms thomas thx for helping my word choices	express yourself, no one can stop being yourself
thx for experience & trying new things	they did a very good job being there for us
you helped advance and keep writing poetry	keep up the good work
thanks for your patience	appreciate the class
protect freedom by any means necessary	class should be offered
thank you	go LACHSA!
offer the class	liked Ms jones teach to perform
thanks for enjoying my performance	teachers supportive, should continue program
show pupils of today & tomorrow the beauty of poetry	you good teacher
thanks for guide us in poetry	thx for the support
help students reach full poetry potential	don't change be yourself always
passion is music & Im first yr decathlete	Thx for caring & helping.
	hard work = success!

Conclusions.

The reports and voices of the Get Lit students suggest that there is a lot to like in the Get Lit program. Its virtues show in boosting student engagement, awareness of the worlds of poets and poetry, the cultivation of new student language and writing proficiencies, new speaking talents, and student gains in affect and motivation. Here we inventory our specific conclusions.

Specific conclusions

- 1) The Get Lit Program is an attractive offering to students. They have some attachment to poetry, especially to Rap styles, as they consider enrolling and find the work connected to their initial ideas about poetry. They finish wanting more.
- 2) The Get Lit program is very well organized, and rich in its designs. The program director and the teachers Get Lit trains have ample skills for the work.
- 3) Get Lit teachers know their stuff, they like poetry, many are involved with poetry professionally. Moreover, they seem genuinely to like adolescents. This is a powerful recipe for success.
- 4) Students take to performing poetry quickly. It's a demanding element of the program, with memorizing poems proving a challenge. But students gain performance proficiency fast, which keeps them at it.
- 5) Final student poetry performances are impressive. Students recited poetry they have learned well, with lots of personal interpretation, connection, with great emotion, and moving expression.
- 6) It's little wonder that students themselves have good things to say about the effects of the program on their abilities to read and understand poems, to write poems, and to write and think more generally.
- 7) The program produced measurable associations with motivation developments – the program appears to cause these effects. We include here academic self-concept, beliefs that their efforts are important, creative thinking, and divergent thinking.

Postscript: And what about the story?

We introduced this report with a narrative that spoke to an idealized version of the Get Lit program. We encourage readers who have scanned this report to go back to the narrative, read through it, and to draw their own conclusions about how the evidence seems consistent with the story.

Much in the story materializes vividly in the classroom. Student learning about poets and classical poetry, probing what poets meant, and writing in poetic ways to connect their own lives – these are all evident. And the process of preparing and performing for classroom peers, and for larger poetry events, seems little short of earthshaking for many students. It's not something they've done before. It motivates, it frightens, it concentrates the mind – and the performance can seem like the best they have ever achieved in a school setting. These experiences go straight to the psyche, to the personal diary, and perhaps eventually to the bank.

Get Lit makes a start on reshaping the high school experience in ways that influence students' lives in high school and beyond.

End of report.

Appendix

Pre-Program Survey

GET LIT, WORDS IGNITE. 2014

We appreciate your responses to these questions. If you do not wish to answer any particular question, you do not have to. All surveys will be held in confidence by the research team and not shared with students or teachers. Thank you very much! Professor James Catterall, UCLA

Name _____ Check if: M___ F___ Age___

1. How long have you been enrolled at your school? ____ years ____ months
2. What is your current grade level? ____8th ____9th ____10th ____11th ____12th
3. Have you ever written a poem? ____ No ____ Yes [1 or 2] ____Yes [3 or more]
4. Have you ever recited a poem of your own before a school class? ____Y ____N
5. If you have any **favorite poets**, please write the names of one or two here:

_____ I don't have any ____

6a. How important has POETRY been to you in the past? (Check one.)

- I'm not very familiar with poetry. _____
- I've read some poems from books and they're OK. _____
- I enjoy reading poems _____
- I read and enjoy poems frequently. _____

6b. What is your most important reason for taking this Get Lit class? (Use margins or back of this page if you need to.)

more >>>

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please check one:

7. I feel like I am a part of my school

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not like me at all	A little like me	Sort of like me	A lot like me	Exactly like me

Get Lit - Words Ignite 2014 Evaluation

8. I think I am doing pretty well in school

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not like me at all	A little like me	Sort of like me	A lot like me	Exactly like me

9. I often focus on new ways to get things in life that are most important to me.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not like me at all	A little like me	Sort of like me	A lot like me	Exactly like me

10. If I'm stuck on a problem, I **usually CAN'T** come up with many ways to solve it.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not like me at all	A little like me	Sort of like me	A lot like me	Exactly like me

11. Luck or chance seems very important in achieving my goals.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not like me at all	A little like me	Sort of like me	A lot like me	Exactly like me

12. I know that hard work is most important in order to do well in life.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not like me at all	A little like me	Sort of like me	A lot like me	Exactly like me

13. Anything else you feel like writing as you get started? Here or on back:

That's it! Thank you. Enjoy this class!

Post-Program Survey

Name _____ School: _____

1. If you have **favorite poets**, please indicate the names of up to *three* here:

2. What do you think about **reading POETRY**? (Check one.)

I don't read much poetry. _____

I've read some poems and they're OK. _____

I enjoy reading poems at times. _____

I read and enjoy poems frequently. _____

3. If performing **classical poetry** is important for you, describe how:

4. If performing **your own poetry** is important for you, describe how:

5. What are the most important things you **learned about yourself** in this class?

One important thing:

Another important thing:

6a. Will you continue to write poems in the future?

No__ Maybe__ Probably__ Yes__ Any comments about this?

6b. Should this class be offered to other students?

No__ Probably not__ Probably__ Yes__ Any comments?

Get Lit – Words Ignite 2014 Evaluation

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please check one:

12. I feel like I am a part of my school

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not like me at all	A little like me	Sort of like me	A lot like me	Exactly like me

13. I think I am doing pretty well in school

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not like me at all	A little like me	Sort of like me	A lot like me	Exactly like me

9. I often focus on **new ways** to get things in life that are most important to me.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not like me at all	A little like me	Sort of like me	A lot like me	Exactly like me

10. If I'm stuck on a problem, **I usually CAN'T come up with many ways** to solve it.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not like me at all	A little like me	Sort of like me	A lot like me	Exactly like me

11. Luck or chance seems very important in achieving my goals.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not like me at all	A little like me	Sort of like me	A lot like me	Exactly like me

12. I know that hard work is most important in order to do well in life.

Get Lit - Words Ignite 2014 Evaluation

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not like me at all	A little like me	Sort of like me	A lot like me	Exactly like me

13. Any message or messages for your teachers in this class?

**Figure 2: Students' Favorite Poets,
Pre- and Post- Program**

Favorite Poets at Program's Start (N=89)	
N	Poet
27	Edgar Allen Poe
14	Theodor Seuss Geisel
12	Shel Silverstein
8	Emily Dickinson
5	Robert Frost
3	Maya Angelou
3	Tupac Shakur
2	Sylvia Plath
2	Alfred Lord Tennyson
2	Walt Whitman
1	Charles Bukowski
1	Langston Hughes
1	Pablo Neruda
1	Biggie Smalls
1	Sarah Kay
1	William Shakespeare
1	Henry David Thoreau
1	Tim Burton
1	T.S. Eliot
1	Alice Walker
1	Oscar Wilde

Get Lit – Words Ignite 2014 Evaluation

Favorite Poets at Program's End (N=151)	
N	Poet
21	Edgar Allen Poe
14	Theodor Seuss Geisel
11	Shel Silverstein
11	Maya Angelou
9	Jimmy Santiago Baca
8	Tupac Shakur
8	Langston Hughes
6	Robert Frost
6	Emily Dickinson
5	Walt Whitman
5	Robert Browning
4	William Shakespeare
4	John Lennon
4	Charles Bukowski
2	William Wordsworth
2	Mary Oliver
2	Naomi Shihab Nye
2	Jim Morrison
2	Lawrence Ferlinghetti
2	ee cummings
1	Yevgeniy Yevtushenko
1	Williams
1	George Watsky
1	Tyler the Creator
1	Anne Sexton
1	Carl Sandburg
1	Sylvia Plath
1	Tim Minchin
1	Claude McKay
1	Margaret Walker
1	Malcom X
1	Mac Miller
1	Paul Laurence Dunbar
1	Katherine Larson
1	Shane Koyczan
1	Ted Kooser
1	Samuel Johnson
1	Kurt Cobain
1	classmates
1	Lewis Carroll
1	Gwendolyn Brooks
1	Emily Bronte
1	Amy Lowell

Get Lit students in this study were generally in the middle of their high school programs – between 16 and 17 years old and about half way through the tenth grade. And about 60 percent were female, 40 percent male.

Participating students came to this class with some experience with poetry. About 80 percent had written at least one poem before and just over half had written more than one poem. Only about a fourth of the students had ever performed a poem – recited a work in front of some sort of audience. Most did not name a favorite poet at the start of *Get Lit*; for those who had a favorite poet, commonly mentioned names are shown on page 5. As the program began, many of these poets showed up as selections studied by the students.

What we learned from the post-program student surveys.

Our post-program survey (a copy is appended) asked students to describe various things they learned during the program. The survey also asked particular questions related to aspects of student motivation, questions that were repeated from the pre-program student survey. We are able to capture changes or growth in student motivation through this design, as we present in Figure 10. (It is more accurate to say that these questions provide modest indicators of student motivation – we enlisted questions standard in the psychological literature, but we did not approach this work with a full battery of multi-item scales as we might in a rigorous research trial).

Performing classical poetry. An initial activity in each class was having students listen to, read, and select a work of an established contemporary or historic poet. And then to memorize a poem or section for presentation to the class. The performing aspect of the *Get Lit* course is central – it forces students to attend to classic poetry, to learn the words, and explore their meaning. Having to recite poetry in meaningful and expressive ways, an explicit goal within the class, is a powerful incentive to attend to the work. So we asked students about the meaning or importance of poetry performance after they had completed the class.

Figure 3 – Post-survey response to Question 3	
If Performing Classical Poetry is Important to you, please state why?	Pct. Response
Practicing self-expression	24.5%
Connecting to poets, to the poem, and to other generations.	24.5%
Practicing public speaking, performing, gaining confidence, memorizing, and / or not being shy	18.6%
Learning about other points of view, learning to express how others feel.	17.6%
Learning about the author and history, learning to interpret poems	14.7%
<i>N=102 of 186</i>	

Shown in Figure 3, the leading student responses about the importance of performing poetry were the opportunities for self-expression and for connecting poets to

their poems and other generations. Advancing skills for public speaking was also cited, along with learning to express how others feel. Students also report that performing is fun and that it helps with self-understanding.

Performing their own poetry. We then turned to this question: What about performing your own poetry? This step followed immersion in classical poetry. Students wrote their own poems – mainly responses to the classical works they had studied, learned, and performed. Students then performed their responses along with the original poems that had inspired them.

Figure 4 - Post-survey response to Question 4	
If Performing <u>Your Own</u> Poetry is Important to you, please state why?	Pct. Response
Practicing self-expression	64.6%
Sharing my ideas, showing who I am	24.3%
Practicing public speaking, performing, gaining confidence, not being shy	6.9%
Helps with Writing	.
<i>N=144 of 186</i>	

Not surprisingly, student responses loaded heavily in two areas. The first was the power of their own poetry in expressing themselves. Students gravitated over the course to more searching and thoughtful regard for their personal takes on their classic poets and ways to convey their responses effectively.

Students also felt that the performance aspect of the class generated pride in the simple accomplishment of performing. This too seems a natural consequence of the

class. Students learned to do something they had largely never done, and they learned (based on our end-of-class observations) to perform with good skills. And they received positive feedback from peers and teachers in doing this. Pride of accomplishment follows.

Students' learning about themselves. We also asked students what they learned about themselves in the process. Since teachers stressed some personal searching and thought in student responses to classical poetry, students typically traversed some territory of self-understanding in the process. Student responses to this question, shown in Table 4, were directed to topical matters of self-understanding (they learned things about themselves from expressing themselves) and also to their learning that they had abilities they had not recognized before – the ability to express, the ability to write poetry, the ability to think better. And through it all, they report gaining confidence.

Figure 5: What is one important thing you learned about yourself that you learned in this class. (Capture this carefully.)	
<i>N</i>	<i>Category</i>
53	I have the ability to perform, to be artistic, to memorize, and / or to speak publicly
35	I built my confidence and / or I overcame shyness
24	I can write poetry
23	I can express myself
19	Writing and / or performing are difficult for me
18	I enjoy poetry and / or performing

10	Other
9	Nothing / I dislike poetry
191 students responded.	

Figure 6: What is another important thing you learned about yourself that you learned in this class?	
<i>N</i>	<i>Category</i>
32	I built my confidence, I overcame shyness, and / or I can express myself
27	I have the ability to perform, to be artistic, to memorize, and / or to speak publicly
25	Writing and / or performing are difficult for me
23	I have a new perspective on poetry and / or I enjoy poetry
13	I can write poetry
120 students responded.	

The very positive student reactions to learning and performing and composing poetry as the main elements of this class(Figures 5, 6, and 7) lead fairly seamlessly to their expectation for the immediate future. More than 90 percent of students reported that they would continue writing poems after the class (66 percent) or probably continue writing poems (26 percent), as shown in Table 5. Figure 6 is a continuation Figure 5, and Figure 7 shows actual student quotes about their self-learning.

Figure 7

**Student quotes: What I've
learned about myself:**

I learned:

"how deep my writing can be"
"I hide my emotions too much"
"get upset when people critique me"
"go deep and express what not seen"
"have passion and can write"
"to be brave"
"I like poetry"
"I can write poetry"
"people actually hear what I want to
say"
"able to speak in front of a crowd"
"comfortable expressing myself with
poetry"
"it's going to be in my future"
"empowered when I speak"
"poetry is not my thing"
"opened many new doors"

"ok to feel vulnerable"

And students enthusiastically support the idea that their schools (or other education programs) offer the Get Lit class in the future, shown in Figure 8. Most students said yes to this question. More than 90 percent said yes or probably yes to the idea of offering the class in the future.

Figure 8: Should Get Lit Offer this Poetry Program in Additional Schools

Yes – 60%
Probably – 28 %
Perhaps – 11 %

202 Responses

Figure 9: Will You Continue to Write Poetry in the Future?

Yes – 26%
Probably – 33%
Maybe – 28%
No – 8%

202 Responses

As shown in Figure 9, about 60 percent of students anticipate writing poetry in the future after completing Get Lit classes. Another 28 percent indicated that they might do so.

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Growth in Student Motivation.

We used a standard strategy for exploring student motivation in this study, although an abbreviated one. Experiences that promote gains in personal competence may contribute to growth in an individual's more general sense of ability and confidence. In the reports above, students showed various ways in which they felt that Get Lit contributed to enhanced competency. These competencies included ability to write poetry, the ability to understand themselves better, and abilities to think and express. Accompanying these developments, students report more general gains in confidence in themselves.

These areas lie in the domain of *achievement motivation* – an area of development focused on self-confidence, self-concept, beliefs in one's self-efficacy and agency, beliefs that one's efforts matter, and the roles of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to act in particular ways. Motivation is an important potential area of effect for a program like Get Lit because visible student accomplishment is at the heart of the work and tangible accomplishment in the midst of one's peers, teachers, and friends and family can have dramatic influences on anyone.

Aspects of motivation status and growth are typically estimated from individual responses to a battery of questions. A set of 5 or 6 questions might probe self-efficacy beliefs, for example. And other sets of questions are each directed to other facets of motivation.

For this study, we kept our motivation assessment brief, because of our needs to collect information in several domains and in a relatively short period of time. We wanted to keep the overall process to about 20 minutes in each survey administration; our past experiences suggest that interest and attention to in-class surveys such as ours can be fragile. We used paired individual questions to explore each of the developments shown in Figure 10; that is, we compared student answers to each question on the post-survey with answers to the same questions on the pre-survey. And we average all student responses on each pre- versus post- question to assess change.

Figure 10

Figure 11: Student Motivation Scale Results

	Pre-score	Post-score	Growth	Significant?
Academic Self-Concept (I think I am doing pretty well in scho	3.45	3.88	0.43	Yes
Fluency with problem-solving ideas	3.92	3.97	0.05	trace
Luck and chance account for most individual success.	3.89	3.68	0.21	Yes*
Hard work is the most important thing for success.	3.59	4.39	0.8	Yes

* Reverse scale: Lower score indicates less belief about luck or chance being important for success.

Positive program associations with motivation indicators. Figure 10 shows significant positive growth between average pre- and post- motivation measures for the 202 program students in the ten *Get Lit* classes. The table points to these by showing pre- and post- scale scores, an indication of whether or not there was growth, (i.e. positive change between specific pre- and post-scores), and statistical significance indications.

These scores reflect academic self-concept, fluency with problem-solving ideas, the role of luck in success (i.e. non-dependence on luck for success, and the importance of hard work for success. The results are impressive, but the growth is not surprising given the duration and intensity of the *Get Lit* experience. They are not surprising first because of what we have seen in the program over the past four years through observations and what students write about their experiences in their post-surveys and in our conversations with students after final performances. A number of things in the program simply work, at least for a majority of students. And where student motivation is concerned, composing and performing poetry in a public space, when done well, can be seen to be uplifting in many ways for the students. They have learned to do something they have never done before; they receive supportive feedback from teachers, their peers, and audiences. Feeling better about yourself and your school experiences are natural correlates.

For some students, *Get Lit* was a primary focus for participants over the time of the 12-week class. This intensive design is rare in regular schools where students study several subjects at once, and where experimental studies attached to a curriculum are typically embedded a varied array of non-related student pursuits.

Student postscripts to their *Get Lit* teachers.

Get Lit – Words Ignite 2014 Evaluation

We affixed a simple question to the post- survey.

Any message or messages for your teacher(s) in this class?

On the following page, in Figure 11, we show the entire inventory of comments. Sixty-four of the students wrote in response to this question. The comments show a lot of praise and endearment for their Get Lit teachers, and for Diane Luby Lane, the program director and principal teacher. The students had been writing poetry for three months; while do not have a pre-measure on this, these comments show a lot of feeling and passion. These seem to symbolize the character and quality of the program in the minds of students.

As teachers during a substantial part of our professional lives, CRoC staff members would eagerly welcome comments such as these about our teaching efforts.

Figure 11

Table 11: Final student messages for their Get Lit teachers

thanks for creative writing class	full course on teaching how to write a poem
Thanks for help to expand as writer	have Get Lit for entire school
don't change anything	to present to classes & practice with mic
thanks for being awesome	give choice whether to share & participate own poetry
Thanks	see teachers perform some poetry
thnks for letting us show our talent	let kids write more to express & learn about selves
techer was amazing	wish could performed front of class more
thank you	didn't enjoy this class very much.
Thanks I enjoyed a lot	hello
now I know what I want out of life	project stressful but thanks sorensen making me present
teachers w/connection to students impact our lives	this class fun, do it again next yr
get this more well known,	keep up the good work
you are great teacher & taught me lots I didn't know	Get Lit best part of class
awesome job teaching & coaching	hi and hello to all teachers
thank you Ms Thomas	thanks! Great exper.
love you all!	if I perform again, I will notify Get Lit
thrilled at Get Lit & thanks for glorious opportunity	do very good at teaching
hard work! Nopain no gain!	thanks for helping me do good in school
should be offered increases skills,open minds,& fun	ms thomas good job, thanks for this experience
ms thomas thx for helping my word choices	express yourself, no one can stop being yourself
thx for experience & trying new things	they did a very good job being there for us
you helped advance and keep writing poetry	keep up the good work
thanks for your patience	appreciate the class
protect freedom by any means necessary	class should be offered
thank you	go LACHSA!
offer the class	liked Ms jones teach to perform
thanks for enjoying my performance	teachers supportive, should continue program
show pupils of today & tomorrow the beauty of poetry	you good teacher
thanks for guide us in poetry	thx for the support
help students reach full poetry potential	don't change be yourself always
passion is music & Im first yr decathlete	Thx for caring & helping.
	hard work = success!

Conclusions.

The reports and voices of the Get Lit students suggest that there is a lot to like in the Get Lit program. Its virtues show in boosting student engagement, awareness of the worlds of poets and poetry, the cultivation of new student language and writing proficiencies, new speaking talents, and student gains in affect and motivation. Here we inventory our specific conclusions.

Specific conclusions

- 8) The Get Lit Program is an attractive offering to students. They have some attachment to poetry, especially to Rap styles, as they consider enrolling and find the work connected to their initial ideas about poetry. They finish wanting more.
- 9) The Get Lit program is very well organized, and rich in its designs. The program director and the teachers Get Lit trains have ample skills for the work.
- 10) Get Lit teachers know their stuff, they like poetry, many are involved with poetry professionally. Moreover, they seem genuinely to like adolescents. This is a powerful recipe for success.
- 11) Students take to performing poetry quickly. It's a demanding element of the program, with memorizing poems proving a challenge. But students gain performance proficiency fast, which keeps them at it.
- 12) Final student poetry performances are impressive. Students recited poetry they have learned well, with lots of personal interpretation, connection, with great emotion, and moving expression.
- 13) It's little wonder that students themselves have good things to say about the effects of the program on their abilities to read and understand poems, to write poems, and to write and think more generally.
- 14) The program produced measurable associations with motivation developments – the program appears to cause these effects. We include here academic self-concept, beliefs that their efforts are important, creative thinking, and divergent thinking.

Postscript: And what about the story?

Get Lit – Words Ignite 2014 Evaluation

We introduced this report with a narrative that spoke to an idealized version of the Get Lit program. We encourage readers who have scanned this report to go back to the narrative, read through it, and to draw their own conclusions about how the evidence seems consistent with the story.

Much in the story materializes vividly in the classroom. Student learning about poets and classical poetry, probing what poets meant, and writing in poetic ways to connect their own lives – these are all evident. And the process of preparing and performing for classroom peers, and for larger poetry events, seems little short of earthshaking for many students. It's not something they've done before. It motivates, it frightens, it concentrates the mind – and the performance can seem like the best they have ever achieved in a school setting. These experiences go straight to the psyche, to the personal diary, and perhaps eventually to the bank.

Get Lit makes a start on reshaping the high school experience in ways that influence students' lives in high school and beyond.

End of report.

Appendix

Pre-Program Survey

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We appreciate your responses to these questions. If you do not wish to answer any particular question, you do not have to. All surveys will be held in confidence by the research team and not shared with students or teachers. Thank you very much! Professor James Catterall, UCLA

Name _____ Check if: M___ F___ Age___

1. How long have you been enrolled at your school? ____ years ____ months
2. What is your current grade level? ____8th ____9th ____10th ____11th ____12th
3. Have you ever written a poem? ____ No ____ Yes [1 or 2] ____Yes [3 or more]
4. Have you ever recited a poem of your own before a school class? ____Y ____N
5. If you have any **favorite poets**, please write the names of one or two here:

_____ I don't have any ____

6a. How important has POETRY been to you in the past? (Check one.)

- I'm not very familiar with poetry. ____
I've read some poems from books and they're OK. ____
I enjoy reading poems ____
I read and enjoy poems frequently. ____

6b. What is your most important reason for taking this Get Lit class? (Use margins or back of this page if you need to.)

more >>>

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please check one:

14. I feel like I am a part of my school

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not like me at all	A little like me	Sort of like me	A lot like me	Exactly like me

15. I think I am doing pretty well in school

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not like me at all	A little like me	Sort of like me	A lot like me	Exactly like me

16. I often focus on new ways to get things in life that are most important to me.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not like me at all	A little like me	Sort of like me	A lot like me	Exactly like me

17. If I'm stuck on a problem, I usually CAN'T come up with many ways to solve it.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not like me at all	A little like me	Sort of like me	A lot like me	Exactly like me

18. Luck or chance seems very important in achieving my goals.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not like me at all	A little like me	Sort of like me	A lot like me	Exactly like me

12. I know that hard work is most important in order to do well in life.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not like me at all	A little like me	Sort of like me	A lot like me	Exactly like me

13. Anything else you feel like writing as you get started? Here or on back:

That's it! Thank you. Enjoy this class!

Post-Program Survey

Name _____ School: _____

1. If you have **favorite poets**, please indicate the names of up to *three* here:

2. What do you think about **reading POETRY**? (Check one.)

I don't read much poetry. _____

I've read some poems and they're OK. _____

I enjoy reading poems at times. _____

I read and enjoy poems frequently. _____

3. If performing **classical poetry** is important for you, describe how:

4. If performing **your own poetry** is important for you, describe how:

5. What are the most important things you **learned about yourself** in this class?

One important thing:

Another important thing:

6a. Will you continue to write poems in the future?

No__ Maybe__ Probably__ Yes__ Any comments about this?

6b. Should this class be offered to other students?

No__ Probably not__ Probably__ Yes__ Any comments?

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please check one:

Get Lit – Words Ignite 2014 Evaluation

19. I feel like I am a part of my school

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not like me at all	A little like me	Sort of like me	A lot like me	Exactly like me

20. I think I am doing pretty well in school

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not like me at all	A little like me	Sort of like me	A lot like me	Exactly like me

9. I often focus on **new ways** to get things in life that are most important to me.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not like me at all	A little like me	Sort of like me	A lot like me	Exactly like me

10. If I'm stuck on a problem, **I usually CAN'T come up with many ways** to solve it.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not like me at all	A little like me	Sort of like me	A lot like me	Exactly like me

11. Luck or chance seems very important in achieving my goals.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not like me at all	A little like me	Sort of like me	A lot like me	Exactly like me

12. I know that hard work is most important in order to do well in life.

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<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not like me at all	A little like me	Sort of like me	A lot like me	Exactly like me

13. Any message or messages for your teachers in this class?