



## Poetry Café lifts PMS students' voices



Selina Barrington, PMS Culture Shock's adviser, Superintendent Dr. Eric Jay Rosser and PMS Principal Kelleyann Royce-Giron and teacher Jonathan Mills join student poets Chris Webb, Gianna Nelson, Harmony Earley, Jake Ramos-Martinez, Amelia Yeargin, Aaliyah Wise, Jaiyana DeShields, Bianca White, Bryce White, Phylea Clarke and Brianna White on stage after the event.

Words flew through the loudspeakers at Poughkeepsie Middle School Friday as students took to the stage for the first PMS Culture Shock Black History Poetry Slam Café.

Superintendent Dr. Eric Jay Rosser, himself a poet, was the master of ceremonies and introduced each poet - even standing beside one who was a little nervous before she got into the groove.

This event was the first for Culture Shock, a long-established club at Poughkeepsie High School, but being offered at PMS for the first time this year.

"We wanted to continue to elevate the creativity of our children by extending and establishing this club at PMS," Rosser said.

Selina Barrington, a 6th grade teacher and the club adviser, put together the March 3, 2023, program which included a musical performance of "Lift Every Voice," by teachers Jonathan Mills and Neal Grover and featured poems from 11 different

poets on topics ranging from honoring Black History Month to depression, family, stress and endangered animals.

The event started with a short video on [the history of spoken word poetry](#) with Dr. Rosser taking the stage afterwards, sharing with the student participants and those in the audience his involvement in the New York State poetry movement in the early 2000s. He shared that he and friends established the Njozi Poetry Slams and [Njozi Magazine](#) that supported Western New York poets who would go on and compete in slams in Cleveland, Ohio; Rochester and New York City and Toronto, Canada. He shared with them that the magazine served as a medium for artists to display their creative expressions and for those already in the field to be highlighted for their accomplishments. He encouraged students to explore expressing themselves through the arts before sharing a short poem he wrote that was featured in the magazine.

The first poet, Chris Webb, an 8th grader, presented two original poems, "My Pieces" and "Echo of Change." The former captured the feelings of anxiety over what's happening in the world today. "But society, it creates a dam over the river that is my soul. Can't breathe, on my knees, begging please for a break from this."

After, Webb explained what was going through his head at the time he wrote it. "It's about some of the stress I felt in the past and wanted to put on paper," he said.

The poem ends with "This is my life, my monster, their hate never ceases. But it helps when a dustpan of a person helps pick up my pieces."

In "Where is the Love?," Aaliyah Wise pondered where to find love amidst the drama going on in the world.



Chris Webb recites his poem, "My Pieces," at the Poetry Café, Friday, March 3, 2023.

"So why is the world disseminating hate?  
 Sure, the world will never be perfect.  
 But I found the answers.  
 The love is at home.  
 The love is at school.  
 Love is where your friends and family are. ...  
 If you look hard enough you will see it all around."  
 Wise, a sixth grader, wrote her poem after hearing the Black Eyed Peas' "Where is the Love," during the time her class was studying African American history.  
 "I was inspired because they fought and lost their lives to make it a better place and I wrote this to talk about where the love is for me," she said after the event.  
 At the conclusion of the event, Rosser presented each poet – Chris Webb, Gianna Nelson, Harmony Earley, Jake Ramos-Martinez, Amelia Yeargin, Aaliyah Wise, Jaiyana DeShields, Bianca White, Bryce White, Phylea Clarke and Brianna White – with their own journal to continue their journey with writing poetry.  
 Rosser applauded the student spoken word artists and told the audience of students, staff and administrators that it took courage for them to come up and read their poems in front of an audience. He confessed that this was the first time he had performed his work as he lacked the courage to do so for over 30 years.  
 Barrington was pleased with the event.

"I knew the students had amazing poems and were excited to read them, but the energy they brought to the state was inspiring," she said. The next Culture Shock event will be a play based on the culture around school violence planned for April.  
 "The Poetry Slam Café was a brilliant bridge from Black History Month to Women's History Month illuminated by the voices of the next generation. Congratulations to Culture Shock and all concerned. This is how we open the gates of opportunity to the next generation," Gully Stanford, co-chair of the PCSD arts working group, said.

As stated above, this event was possible through the creativity and hard work of Ms. Barrington. Club advisor and 6th grade PMS teacher. Kudos to her!

## PHS Culture Shock celebrates Black History Month

Culture Shock at PHS put on a series of events designed to celebrate Black History Month, including the first Black History Month Spirit Week which explored various aspects of African American Culture. During school, each day had a theme:

- Tuesday was Retro Tuesday, a throwback to the 1970s.
- Wednesday was Hip-Hop Culture Day with students encouraged to dress like their favorite hip hop artist.
- Thursday was Rep Your Roots Day during which students were encouraged to wear attire that represented their culture.
- Friday was Blackout Friday and students were encouraged to dress in all black. Names of victims in the African American community were displayed throughout the main lobby and their names read during the transition of every period.



PHS Culture Shock members show items created for Black History Month.

Other activities extended into after-school events.

A movie night on Tuesday featured “Woman King” in the auditorium with popcorn, beverages and ice cream sundaes.

Wednesday afternoon found students painting African American art.

On Thursday, students met various members of Greek organizations to learn about community and unity at Historically Black Colleges and Universities.



At top, some of the MLK art on display at Vassar College. Above, the monochromatic self-portraits.

## Vassar gallery shows district artwork

Student art from two Poughkeepsie City School District elementary schools is on display at Vassar College for the John Iyoya’s 36th Annual Children’s Art Exhibit. Sponsored by Vassar College’s department of education, the art exhibit highlights local children’s art from school districts in the region.

Aligned with the [Vision for Arts Education](#) in the Poughkeepsie City School District, the Children’s Art Exhibit seeks to expand children’s interest in the visual arts and encourages their use of the arts to express themselves. The exhibit’s namesake, John Iyoya, was a Vassar student known for his creativity and love of children. Student artwork from Morse and Warring were curated by the schools’ art teachers Kathy Orza (Warring) and Melissa Cascio (Morse) and adorned the walls of the gallery. Both teachers welcomed PCSD students and parents, local art enthusiasts, and patrons from other school districts to see the fabulous art on display. Highlights of the artwork from both schools’ second, third, fourth and fifth graders included art based on the Ice Palace at Saranac Lake, NY; favorite pastries from Dunkin’, Tim Burton-inspired monochromatic self-portraits, Black History and a rendering of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. that Warring Elementary fifth graders collaboratively worked on (this rendering was used as the art used on the front cover of the Art Exhibits opening reception invitation and also was a part of the [art displayed in Albany last month](#)). A Celebration of Children’s Art is on display through March 10th at Vassar College in the James W. Palmer III Gallery.

### Athlete of the Month

## Runner Douglas uses reminders to help stay on track

Poughkeepsie High School senior Maurice Douglas was named February’s Student Athlete of the Month for his superb running skills and reliability.

For Douglas, being named as the Student Athlete of the Month came as a surprise because he took a year off from the boys indoor track and field team during the 2021-2022 school year and felt that his teammates had more experience. He pulled himself out of the rut by realizing that everyone makes mistakes and remembered how well he did during previous seasons, including running 300 meters in 38 seconds and 55 meters in six seconds.

“Not every day is going to be what you think the outcome will be,” Douglas



Senior Maurice Douglas is February’s Athlete of the Month.

said. "I learn and grow."

Before track, Douglas played basketball and soccer, but wanted to get involved in a sport with less risk of injury.

His former coaches recommended Douglas try running and he stuck with it because of the camaraderie with his teammates.

"I like the teamwork," Douglas explained. "We just throw tough love and push each other to get better." Outside of school, Douglas works the drive-thru at Taco Bell in Poughkeepsie and studies computer hardware at Dutchess BOCES. He effectively manages schoolwork, practice and his job by setting reminders, having his uniform ready for practice the night before and giving himself sufficient time to complete homework.

"I'll have everything in little sections," Douglas said. "I take care of myself after work, take a shower, make time for my schoolwork, measure that out and continue it the next day."

After graduation, Douglas plans to enroll at Dominican University New York where he will major in business and continue track.

"I want to see how far I can go," he said. "If I made it this far in high school, I wonder how far I can make it in college."

For anyone interested in pursuing track, Douglas recommends that runners never give up and they surround themselves with people who encourage them.

"If you're not seeing progress right now, just take the time and put in the hard work," Douglas said. "It will count one day."

Varsity Track Coach Jason Conrad nominated Douglas as the athlete of the month because he has grown emotionally, learned how to be a leader and took initiative on the field.

"He grew to the point where he was ready to take on challenges and put that work in," Conrad said. "He sees the success of hard work."



Poughkeepsie City School District's social workers, (L-R) Elizabeth Carrol-Clark, Morse; Annie Happel, Warring; Amanda Delaney, Clinton; Darienne Brenner, Krieger; Lizabeth Madara, PHS; Toni Nicolich, ELC and Simone Stewart, PMS; pose for a photo at PMS during National School Social Work Week.

the value they add to the school community," Rebecca Oliver, executive director of the association, said.

## Upcoming events

- **TONIGHT, Wednesday March 8:** Wizard of Oz community performance, 6 p.m., Krieger Elementary School, 265 Hooker Ave. Admission is free.
- **Thursday, March 9:** Superintendent's Conference Day, schools closed.

## PCSD honors school social workers

The Poughkeepsie City School District would like to take this opportunity during National School Social Work Week to acknowledge the hard work of all our school social workers. Thank you for your dedication to our students! You are an intricate part of the Poughkeepsie City School District team and you are appreciated.

Thank you for being a Champion of Children! The School Social Work Association celebrates National School Social Work Week each year during the first full week of March. This year's theme is "We Rise," as social workers support students, families and the greater school community.

"School Social Workers are humble professionals who often are the voice for students and families but do not always voice