



Louder Than a Bomb

Film Study Guide

Director: Jon Siskel, Greg Jacobs

2010 | Documentary | 97 Minutes | English

<https://www.louderthanabombfilm.com/>

Synopsis: Every year, more than six hundred teenagers from over sixty Chicago area schools gather for the world's largest youth poetry slam, a competition known as "Louder Than a Bomb". Founded in 2001, Louder Than a Bomb is the only event of its kind in the country—a youth poetry slam built from the beginning around teams. Rather than emphasize individual poets and performances, the structure of Louder Than a Bomb demands that kids work collaboratively with their peers, presenting, critiquing, and rewriting their pieces. To succeed, teams have to create an environment of mutual trust and support. For many kids, being a part of such an environment—in an academic context—is life-changing.

Louder Than a Bomb chronicles the stereotype-confounding stories of four teams as they prepare for and compete in the 2008 event. By turns hopeful and heartbreaking, the film captures the tempestuous lives of these unforgettable kids, exploring the ways writing shapes their world, and vice versa. This is not "high school poetry" as we often think of it. This is language as a joyful release, irrepressibly talented teenagers obsessed with making words dance. How and why they do it—and the community they create along the way—is the story at the heart of this inspiring film.

Post-Screening Discussion Questions

1. Which student in the film do you find the most captivating? Why are you drawn to this student? Is it their poetry, their personality or both?
2. Nate's mother comments that he was a quiet child, yet he is a strong writer and performer. How do you think poetry can help someone find their voice?
3. Is there something that you do (writing, music, dance, film) that helps you speak your mind and express yourself?
4. Slam poetry is said to have been invented in Chicago in 1984. Research (using some of the links provided below) the slam poetry timeline and history. How has it changed? How has it become more mainstream and/or become popular?
5. What are similarities between slam poetry/spoken word performance and hip-hop/rap? How are they different?
6. A single line or phrase from a poem can be inspiring. Is there a particular poem or moment in the film that inspires you or is most memorable for you? Discuss why.
7. Why do you think the Louder Than a Bomb program and competition is important and helpful for students? Are there any art programs in your school or community that offer a creative outlet for participants?
8. Compare the poets in the film to famous poets like T.S. Elliot, Allen Ginsberg, Robert Frost, or Sylvia Plath. How are their poems different or similar?
9. What makes a poem a "slam" poem or appropriate for spoken word performance?
10. This film is a documentary. Do you think the filmmakers did a good job documenting the subjects and Chicago? Do you think they accurately depicted Chicago and Chicago students?
11. In the film, Kevin and Big C. are spoken to by their teachers about their attitude and behavior toward the rest of the team. How is slam poetry, and Louder Than a Bomb not only an individual activity but also a group activity?
12. Speaking your mind and expressing your emotions can be difficult. The Louder Than a Bomb competition has a saying, "The point is not the points. The point is the poetry." Why do you think they stress this saying? Why do you think it's an important saying to those who are participating? How does it take away some of the fear of performing?