



Louder Than a Bomb

This film chronicles the stories of four high school spoken-word teams as they prepare for and compete in the 2008 citywide poetry slam competition held in Chicago, Illinois. With each round hopeful and heartbreaking, the film captures the often 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 powerful release for these 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.



Recommended for ages 13+

Themes: creative expression; coming of age; diversity; friendship; inequality; race; stereotypes; social change; social class; resilience

Director(s): Greg Jacobs & Jon Siskel | **99 min** | **Documentary** | **2010** | **Country:** USA | **Language:** In English

Official film website: www.louderthanabombfilm.com

SET THE STAGE | THOUGHT-STARTERS

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Every year, more than 600 teenagers from over 60 Chicago-area schools gather for the world's largest youth poetry slam, a competition called "Louder Than a Bomb." 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.

WORDS TO KNOW

- **Documentary:** A type of film that attempts to explain reality.
- **Poetry Slam:** A competition for the performance of poetry.
- **Stereotype:** A widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.

For more film terms, refer to the PCFF Film Glossary (pcfFri.org/FilmHub).

TALK ABOUT IT | DISCUSSION

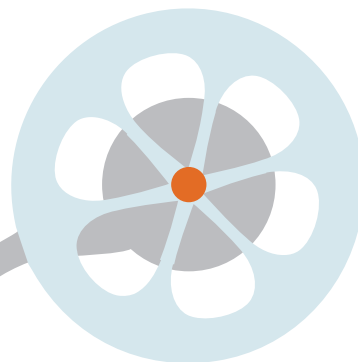
- What was your favorite moment in the film? Why do you think that moment stands out to you? Think about what happened right before or after that moment, too.
- Which person's or team's story did you think was the most interesting? What made them stand out to you?
- What comes to mind when you think of poetry? Do you have good or bad feelings about it? Are there generalizations or stereotypes that people make about reading and writing poetry? What are they?
- This film focuses on a unique extra-curricular program specifically for Chicago-area schools, but similar programs exist in other parts of the country. What are some unique programs that your school (or former school) provides that may be of interest to other schools and students?
- To make a documentary, filmmakers have to find a story first and then decide how they will tell the story. What choices did the filmmakers have to make when they decided to tell a story about this competition? How do you think they decided who to follow and what moments to include in the film?



Clues and Cues

Pay attention while watching

- Think about how and why the filmmakers selected certain students and teams to spotlight in this documentary.
- Listen to how the students change the tone of their voice and watch their body movements when they perform their poems to an audience



GET CREATIVE | EXTENSION ACTIVITIES



For Activity Reel details, downloadable storyboard template and more, visit the the Film Hub website: www.pcffri.org/FilmHub

• Writing Prompt

Materials: Pen, paper (optional: markers)

What do you think it means to be “Louder than a Bomb,” and why do you think that was chosen to be the name of the competition instead of Chicago Schools’ Poetry Slam? If you were planning a big event, such as a talent show, what would you name it to get everyone’s attention? Create a poster or flyer with the name of your imagined event. Be ready to explain why you came up with your name and what you think it conveys to an audience!

• The Interconnected Story

Materials: Pen, paper, pictures

There are arguably four main characters in this story: Nate, Adam, Nova and the Steinmenaut Team—each with their own stories, interconnected through one single event: the poetry competition. Collect pictures of at least three different people from magazines or printed out from a computer. Now write the stories of each of these characters and come up with a single event that would bring them all together. Consider creating characters who might not typically connect or interact.

• Are You Louder Than A Bomb?

Materials: Pen, paper (optional: camera or tape recorder)

Louder than a Bomb is a poetry competition in spoken word format. If you were competing, what would you present? Try writing a poem that you think represents you (and potentially any life-struggles). After writing it, PERFORM IT (even if it’s only to an audience of 1 or 2). Maybe even FILM yourself doing it! How does performing the poem affect its meaning and impact? You may discover you have some poetry writing/performing talent that you never even knew about.

MAKE CONNECTIONS | ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources complement the film and inspire further discussion or programming.

BOOKS

- **Ernest Hemingway on Writing**
by Larry W. Phillips, editor
Hemingway’s insights offer helpful advice to writers on the craft of writing, work habits, and the writing life.
- **Writing Poems, 8th Edition**
by Michelle Boisseau
The gold standard of poetry writing books, *Writing Poems* is a comprehensive, easy-to-use guide that will help aspiring poets create meaningful works.
- **Take the Mic: The Art of Performance Poetry, Slam, and the Spoken Word**
by Marc Kelly Smith and Joe Kraynak
- **Please Excuse This Poem: 100 New Poets for the Next Generation**
by Brett Fletcher Lauer and Lynn Melnick

FILMS

- **The Year We Thought About Love** (2015)
Explore what happens when a diverse group of LGBTQ youth dares to be “out” on stage to reveal their lives and their loves.
- **Once in a Lullaby** (2011)
Documentary about the fifth-grade chorus of PS22 on Staten Island, NY that became a YouTube sensation.
- **Hoop Dreams** (1994)
Critically acclaimed documentary about aspiring high school basketball players. The film also explores issues of race, class, and education in modern America.
- **Slam** (1998)
The story of Ray Joshua, an original, gifted young MC trapped in a war-zone housing project known as Dodge City.

- **Freedom Writers** (2007)
A group of at-risk high school students is inspired to live their dreams beyond high school while learning the value of hard work and tolerance along the way.
- **Ten9Eight** (2009)
This documentary looks at inner city teens across the country, from Harlem to Compton.

•  *Indicates PCFF festival selection*

LOCAL CONNECTIONS

- **Providence Poetry Slam**
provslam.wordpress.com
- **AS220**
An artist-run organization committed to providing an unjuried forum for the arts.
www.as220.org/about/
- **MassLEAP Louder Than a Bomb** This organization sponsors an annual youth poetry slam festival similar to the Chicago LTAB event.
www.massleap.org

BEYOND THE FILM | RELATED INTERNET LINKS

- **Film Review of LTAB:** www.avclub.com/review/louder-than-a-bomb-56319
- **Boston Globe article on Local Poetry Slam:**
www.bostonglobe.com/lifestyle/2013/05/20/poetry-slam-competition-louder-than-bomb-nears-finals/twNbEAod8ZQg7ma4nf5CIJ/story.html