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## Students 'slam' poetry during Idol

### Teacher says program helps engage students' interest about poetry unit

By JENNIFER NESBITT

Advocate Reporter

NEWARK -- The scene was set. The contestants were ready. But this was not "American Idol."

Rather, it was the St. Francis de Sales version of the show, "Slam Idol," during which seventh- and eighth-grade students performed slam poetry they had written in English class.

The "show," which was put on for grades four through eight Thursday, was complete with the "American Idol" theme song, Ryan Seacrest's catch phrases and Simon Cowell's sarcastic criticism.

"Slam Idol" featured 12 contestants, chosen by four of Lisa Givens' English classes. After performing their original poetry, students faced the criticism of Randy Jackson, Paula Abdul and Simon, or Principal Cheryl Spain and teachers Julie Powless and Elizabeth Jackson.

Spain, in imitation of Jackson, greeted contestants with the traditional "Yo, yo, baby, what's up," told them to "Check it out, check it out" and gave criticism such as, "That was a little crazy in spots for me."

Powless, dressed in a sparkly top and donning oversized beads, cheered on every contest and only had positive comments after performances.

Jackson, as Simon, on the other hand, criticized all of the contestants, the other judges and some of St. Francis' teachers.

"I thought that was about as obnoxious as Randy, dawg," Jackson sarcastically told one student after her performance.

In the end, the audience of students, who booed, cheered and waived signs during the performances, voted Katie Richardson, who acted out a dramatic poem about coffee addiction, as their 2007 Idol.

Givens, the teacher who organized the event, said she was thrilled with how the first "Slam Idol" turned out, and she said she'll definitely be planning on repeating the event next year and "every year for as long as they want to do it."

Givens said she came up with "Slam Idol" as a way to get her students excited about their poetry unit. Slam poetry seemed perfect, Givens said, because it allows students to express their own thoughts in a variety of forms.

"Poetry, as a whole at this age, they just don't like it," Givens said. "You have to find a way to engage them."

Givens said each of her students has written about 30 poems during the past month. On Fridays, her classroom would transform into a poetry cafe where students could perform their work. Those who got good reviews Fridays were voted into the "Idol" competition, the final part of the poetry unit.

While teachers and students alike were ecstatic about holding their own "Idol" competition, Givens said she felt slam poetry had her students excited.

"It's such a modern, free-spoken form of poetry," Givens said. "It's just them speaking their words. I think that's

why it's so engaging to them."

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