

### POETRY - Pablo Neruda

And it was at that age...Poetry arrived  
in search of me. I don't know, I don't know where  
it came from, from winter or a river.

I don't know how or when,  
no they were not voices, they were not  
words, nor silence,  
but from a street I was summoned,  
from the branches of night,  
abruptly from the others,  
among violent fires  
or returning alone,  
there I was without a face  
and it touched me.

I did not know what to say, my mouth  
had no way  
with names,  
my eyes were blind,  
and something started in my soul,  
fever or forgotten wings,  
and I made my own way,  
deciphering  
that fire,

and I wrote the first faint line,  
faint, without substance, pure  
nonsense,  
pure wisdom

of someone who knows nothing,  
and suddenly I saw  
the heavens  
unfastened  
and open,  
planets,

palpitating planations,  
shadow perforated,  
riddled

with arrows, fire and flowers,  
the winding night, the universe.

And I, infinitesimal being,  
drunk with the great starry  
void,

likeness, image of  
mystery,

felt myself a pure part  
of the abyss,

I wheeled with the stars,  
my heart broke loose on the wind.



# GET-IT

★ WORDS IGNITE ★

INCREASING  
**TEEN LITERACY**  
THROUGH  
CLASSICAL  
POETRY!





INCREASING **TEEN** LITERACY  
THROUGH **CLASSICAL** POETRY!

## WHAT IS GET LIT?

Founded in 2006 in Los Angeles, Get Lit is a leading non-profit presenter of literary performance, education, and teen poetry programs. Get Lit uses the memorization and recitation of classic poetry as a launch pad for teen-created spoken word, fusing the two forms of expression into compelling performances, conducted by teens in school, after school, and through the organization's own select group of Get Lit Players. Get Lit has reached over 15,000 at-risk teens in more than 45 high schools, turning students into motivated scholars inspired to stay in school and thrive.

## MISSION

*Get Lit is dedicated to bringing the power of poetic expression to at risk teens through a standards-based curriculum fusing classic literature and poetry with contemporary Spoken Word performance techniques. Get Lit's programs are designed to boost literacy, foster cultural understanding, and encourage creative self-expression. By immersing teens in the world of great books (often for the first time), Get Lit equips students for future success in college and the workplace by building concise writing skills and dynamic public speaking abilities and a foundation of self-confidence.*

## GOALS

- \* Expand performance and writing skills of Los Angeles' high school students through exposure to classical literature and poetry.
- \* Equip teens with communication skills to successfully navigate the challenges they face.
- \* Nurture teens and provide leadership skills by implementing peer to peer learning strategies.
- \* Prepare teens for college and future careers.
- \* Develop life long learners who participate in the arts.



## PROGRAMS

### GET LIT in school

A standards based literacy program where students work on the writing and recitation of classic/spoken word poetry techniques.

#### RESULTS

- \* It is one of the few programs approved by both the Los Angeles Unified School District and as an Arts Education Provider.*
- \* Professor James Catterall & his UCLA team give Get Lit's IN SCHOOL CURRICULUM a "resounding endorsement" and say that it significantly increases the literacy rates, efficacy, and self confidence of teens in its programs.*

### GET LIT after school

An after school performance program that explores classic and contemporary poetry in an interactive forum. It also offers a place for teens to construct their own pieces and perform them

#### RESULTS

- \* Teens get one on one assistance with reading poetry and interpreting complicated text as well as writing original poetic responses. Vocabulary and grammar skills increase dramatically.*
- \* Get Lit workshops expose students to advanced, college level reading material, which gives students interest in material beyond grade level and confidence in their abilities to meet the rigorous demands of college level work.*

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### Get Lit Players

A troupe of teen poets who come from Southern California high schools. They perform both classic and spoken word poetry for over 10,000 teens each year, inspiring their peers to read, write, participate in the arts, and be leaders in

#### RESULTS

- \* 15 selected teens from high schools throughout LA participate in our Get Lit Player program and receive up to 200 free poetry workshop and performance hours a year.*
- \* 65 Get Lit Players have completed the program since inception.*
- \* The Get Lit Players were recently invited to the White House where they were recognized by Michelle Obama for their poetic talent and community outreach.*

### LITERATE

A program for graduates of the Get Lit Player program, ages 19-25. LITERATE members often perform in concert with the Get Lit Players and also work as poetic mentors.

#### RESULTS

- \* LITERATE provides over 35 hours of mentor training and residency at LAUSD schools as standards-based mentors.*
- \* LITERATE members continue to develop as artists and the on going exposure helps them to promote their own creative endeavors in poetry, music, film, and other art forms. ous demands of college level work.*



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## PROGRAMS

### NEXT step

A program that provides the Get Lit Players & GET LIT LA teen editors with one on one guidance through the college application process; SAT/ACT prep & essay writing courses; and scholarship opportunities.

### RESULTS

- \*Nearly 100% of our graduating teens go to college.
- \*Over 70% of our teens receive college scholarships.

### CLASSIC slam

An annual teen poetry event to launch in April 2012 during National Poetry Month. At this event, Southern California teens recite classic poetry as well as perform their own spoken word poems and compete for poetic supremacy for thousands of their peers!

### RESULTS

- \*Get Lit will train 16 teachers in the writing and recitation of classic/spoken word poetry techniques. This will bring Get Lit's proven IN SCHOOL curriculum to teens who might otherwise have no exposure to the arts.

### Get Lit LA

An online publication created by teens for teens that is devoted to the arts. Professional journalists are teamed with teen editors to create story ideas and content around topics of Film/Poetry/Music/Social Action/ and Art. Teens from the community weigh in with their response.

### RESULTS

- \*Using the expertise of 8 professional writers and journalists, Get Lit LA provides teens with valuable job experience in the areas of journalism, web design, marketing, and Board development.
- \* It brings together teens from different sections of the city – for increased dialogue and understanding, transcending race, gender, socio economics, and geography.

## NOTE FROM FOUNDER:

Words are powerful. They enter our dark, ignorant places and light them.

I have been a teacher, private mentor and literacy coach, working in schools and libraries in NYC, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, for almost twenty years. A few years ago I implemented a poetry program I'd created in a high school in South Central, Los Angeles.

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We reviewed many poems including the Langston Hughes poem, "Expendable," which prompted a discussion of the Iraq war. We talked about Walt Whitman's "Do I contradict myself? Very well, I contradict myself. I am large. I contain multitudes" --- and I asked them --- "are you more than the face you present to the world?" We discussed Zora Neale Hurston's "Ya gotta go there ta know there" ---and I asked them--- "where have you been?"

One day, a boy named Victor, turned in a piece of loose-leaf paper that said:

I'm sad  
I'm thinking things that hurt my feelings.  
I want to be someone else better than me  
I want to change everything I see around me.  
I'm feeling lonely.  
I'm feeling that something beautiful is going to happen.

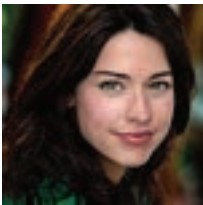
And I wondered, would something beautiful happen for Victor?

Would he graduate from a school with a 75% drop out rate? Would he go to college when less than 50% of graduates from his school did? Would he survive the violence of his streets where gang bangs and drug deals were constant?

I wanted to show Victor a world he'd never seen, so I left him the gift that had saved my life... love of books.

In books, (different than movies and TV where you watch other people) the heroes you meet inevitably begin looking like you do. The adventures, trials, explorations they face, YOU face. As they grow, YOU grow. It is a powerful transference. Reading raises standardized test scores BUT MORE THAN THAT it raises confidence, compassion, optimism, and belief in oneself!

As educators, we cannot possibly reach every student that needs us. We can impart in them a desire, thirst, demand for knowledge any way they can get it. It has been created for them, and it is waiting. It will not come to them. They have to reach for it.



*We have to give them the desire to extend their hand!*

Diane Luby Lane  
Founder, Executive Director, Get Lit-Words Ignite

### **Diane Luby Lane** **Founder, Executive Director, Get Lit-Words Ignite**

Los Angeles' leading nonprofit presenter of literary performance, education and teen poetry programs, and the Get Lit Players, an award-winning classic teen poetry troupe, who perform for over 10,000 teens each year. Lane is author of Words of Women, a compendium of original monologues for women published around the world and has appeared in numerous films, television shows, and national commercials. Her critically acclaimed one-woman show, Deep Sea Diving (AKA Born Feet First), has toured high schools and colleges across America with poet Jimmy Santiago Baca. In recognition of her work as an educator and creator of Get Lit's ground-breaking literacy curriculum, Lane has received the James Patterson Page Turner Award for promoting literacy and the KNX Hero Award. She has been featured in the LA Times and PBS and is on the Board of the Los Angeles Drama Club, which brings Shakespeare instruction to underserved elementary school youth.



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Get Lit has grown exponentially due in large part through the help & genius of our supporters and partners.

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## GET LIT IN THE NEWS

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FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2009

# Los Angeles Times

latimes.com

## OUT THERE

# Proving poetry's power

A troupe of teens presents works to young audiences, and literature suddenly gets very real.

SCOTT GOLD

**F**or as long as he can remember, Dario Serrano's life was all screeching tires and echoing gunshots, babies' cries and barking dogs, a symphony, as he puts it, of "hood rats and gangsters," of "*vatos* and *payasos*" — dudes and numskulls, loosely translated.

By high school, he'd pretty much given up on himself. He bounced around between three schools. He started selling pot, though he always seemed to smoke more than he sold. His GPA fell to 0.67, which is about as bad as you can get and still be showing up.

Literature, it is fair to say, was not resonating. "I mean, 'The Great Gatsby'?" he says incredulously, and when he puts it like that, Lincoln Heights does feel pretty far from Long Island.

When a friend suggested that poetry might be his thing, Serrano scoffed. Grudgingly, he started tagging along to a poetry club, and one day last year he took his lunch break in a classroom



**AUDIENCE AWAITS:** Jazmine Williams, 15, a Hamilton High sophomore, leads the other Get Lit Players onto the Dorsey High School stage.

where a teen troupe called Get Lit was holding auditions.

Get Lit's artistic director, an African American artist named Azure Antoinette, performed an original composition called "Box," a denunciation of anyone who would define her by the color of her skin, who would lump together, thoughtlessly, faces of color:

"The general population has come to a consensus that we don't have a prayer," she said, her voice filling the room. "All we have is prayer. . . . We are not victims."

This, Serrano thought, was something he could get behind.

Today the nonprofit Get Lit Players [See Out There, Page B8]

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## GET LIT IN THE NEWS



Photographs by ROBERTY GAUTHIER, Los Angeles Times

**PRACTICE:** At left, Daniela Rocha, 18, a Hamilton High School senior, screams while rehearsing with the troupe. Jazmine Williams, at right, remains expressive while reciting a poem as well. On Wednesday, their Hamilton High School audience was listless at the beginning of the show; by the end, a dozen students had joined them onstage to learn about auditions.

# Get Lit Players bring literature to life

[**Out There**, from Page B1] are barnstorming Los Angeles, kids performing for kids, thousands of them over the course of a dozen school performances this winter and spring.

Some of their readings are of the classic variety — Ezra Pound: Langston Hughes; “The Boy Died in My Alley” by the great Gwendolyn Brooks, written in the voice of a girl who confesses that she heard the gunshot but didn’t think much of it because she’d also heard “the thousand shots before.”

But much of their material consists of in-your-face original compositions — about teenage mothers and mixed-race children, about gang violence and immigrant pride — that are performed in English, Spanish, Portuguese and Bengali, like a soundtrack to a modern, messy L.A.

Serrano, now 18, has become a troupe leader. Poetry, he says, saved his life. He graduated last year from Marshall High School, earning straight A’s in the homesretch, he said, and now attends East Los An-

latimes.com  
outthere

### Extended coverage

Staff photographer Rob Gauthier’s audio slide show of the Get Lit poetry troupe can be found online. Readers can also find the archives of *Out There*, Scott Gold’s series of weekly postcards from across Southern California, as well as video documentaries, photo galleries and more. In coming weeks, look for new installments from the San Gabriel Valley and Koreatown.

geles College, where he is considering a career in education.

One of his compositions, “Home Is,” is an anchor of the Get Lit shows. Like many poets before him, Serrano has discovered that unvarnished autobiography often makes for the strongest material:

*You can say it to my face; I ain’t afraid to admit I was other stereotypes: A*

*joker, a drug broker, a known toker, a first day of school loner*  
*A drug abuser, a street cruiser*

*But I guess you can say I’m a geek, incognito*

**I**t is a rainy afternoon in West Hollywood, and Diane Luby Lane is insisting that she is not a crier, though this is the third time she has cried before finishing a bowl of soup. They are not tears of sadness, nor joy, but rather a passion for the written word that feels disarming in a busy, digital world.

“Listen to this,” Lane says, and from her purse, she produces a copy of Walt Whitman’s “Leaves of Grass” that has very nearly been loved to death. She reads from Whitman’s “Song of Myself”: “I will not have a single person slighted or left away.”

“He’s saying: ‘I’m for you,’” Lane says; literature, in other words, is for everyone.

Lane, 40, Get Lit’s founder and executive director, did not always believe that.

She does not equate the

troubles of her youth with the difficult lives of many troupe members; her childhood in suburban New Jersey, she says, was merely unimaginative.

She was a middling student and did not find literature until after she dropped out of college. It was the late 1980s, and she was modeling overseas. The other models, from Russia, Germany and France, “were not brain surgeons,” she said, yet they were versed in Tolstoy, in Goethe. Lane decided that she should be, too.

The other thing she keeps in her purse is a journal titled “Books I’ve Read,” and they’re all there, hundreds of them, including “Shogun” and “Animal Farm,” seven Carlos Castaneda in a row; plays by Neil Simon.

In 2000, she launched a well-received one-woman show about books and the impact they had on her life, which began similarly themed school workshops and then Get Lit. Lane makes her living as a successful commercial actor, but makes her life in poetry.

“This is so cheap and so accessible, something we can get into the hands of our kids,” Lane says, holding up her Whitman. “They will find what they are looking for. A lot of children are just broken. But they can be saved.”

**O**n Wednesday, the troupe huddled behind a thick theater curtain in the auditorium of Dorsey High School. Its shows are designed to drum up interest not only in poetry and literacy, but also in the auditions Get Lit will hold in coming weeks. This one looked like it might be a tough show, and a tough sell.

No one seemed to know how to operate the auditorium’s lights, or the thermostat, for that matter, turning the building into a dank, dim grotto. The 200 students filing in, meanwhile, looked uninterested at best. Many had hooded sweat shirts pulled over their faces; a few wore sunglasses in the dark room. When Lane and Antoinette performed an opening

segment, intertwining poetry with dizzying statistics about illiteracy and education, there were audible yawns.

Backstage, Lane gathered her flock. “Remember,” she told them, “you are poets. They have never seen literature the way you do it.” She was right.

Ryan Jafar, a 17-year-old from the Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies, took the stage first. He blinked into the restless crowd, then said quietly: “This is for everyone who’s ever felt weird or different.”

Then he launched into an original composition, “Space Traveler.” Before long, he was on fire, ranting against pop culture “garbage” and rampant commercialism. By the time he reached the climax of his piece — “Cars? Clothes? Hos? No! No! No!” — the audience was roaring its approval.

Over the next hour, the performers deftly wove together well-known poetry and hip-hop-styled “slam” poetry. Serrano performed “Alone” by Edgar Allan Poe, but not before [See *Out There*, Page B9]

# GET LIT IN THE NEWS

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**LEADER:** Get Lit founder Diane Luby Lane, right, chats with Daniela Rocha. Lane was a model and college dropout in the 1980s when she decided to become versed in literature.



**BREAK IT DOWN:** Ryan Jafar, in sunglasses, and Dario Serrano, right, do some freestyle rap with Dorsey High School students. Jafar compared a line by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow to a line by hip-hop artist Talib Kweli.

## Making poetry resonate

{**Out There**, from Page B8} pointing out that he'd often felt alone himself, back when he was flunking out of high school: "From childhood's hour I have not been as others were." Jafar compared a line from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "The Children's Hour" to a line from Talib Kweli in which the hip-hop artist dotes on his son. "It's the exact same thing," Jafar told the students. "Just in

different language." By the time it was over, 12 students had joined the troupe onstage to sample poetry and pledge to audition. Antoinette, the artistic director, closed the show with a performance of "Box," the poem that got Serrano hooked two years ago: *Don't put me in a box If you must, put me in a box of writers, poets, artistic*

*dreamers, patriots for world peace...* *Put me in a box with no walls, no top, no bottom ... where I will flourish, where I can turn the Earth on its ear.* Serrano, his work done for the day, listened from the darkness backstage, his eyes closed, his body swaying to the rhythm of the words. [scott.gold@latimes.com](mailto:scott.gold@latimes.com)