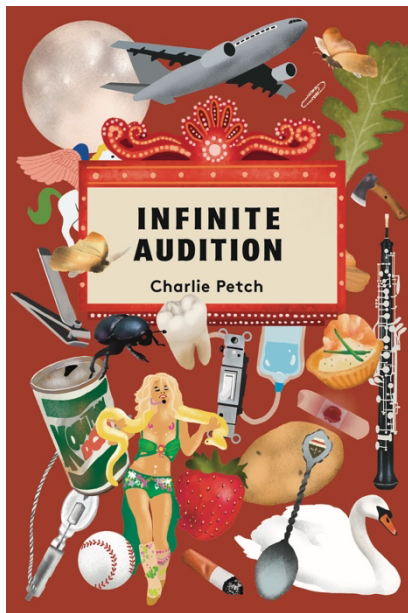


# EDUCATOR GUIDE



## Infinite Audition

Charlie Petch

### About the book

*Infinite Audition* is a work that explores the breadth of what spoken word poetry can be. The sections range from solo performances, to musical, dance, and puppetry collaborations, to monologues and audition pieces for trans and non-binary actors from Petch's theatrical and operatic works. Each poem is its own little world: sometimes they speak in the voice of a hotel or a closet, Medusa's serpent or surgically removed body parts out for a night on the town. Expect only the unexpected.

### Who is the Book For?

While *Infinite Audition* is rich in accessible language and story, and could appeal to all ages, it does have some content warnings: addiction, drug use, domestic violence, and sexual assault. This book will do best in high schools and universities. It could be a resource in both English and Theatre classes.

It also demonstrates collaboration with music, puppetry, and longer forms such as libretto and spoken word theatre.

It has massive appeal for the 2SLGBTQ+ crowd, as it is written by a disabled transmasculine person; much of its story is concentrated on what it is like to grow up without knowing who you are.

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## A Poetry Book in Three Acts

### Act 1 – Poems for solo performance

Here you will find poems that would be at home at a “Poetry Slam.” These are stand-alone poems that would lend themselves to performance.

**Recommended poems for youth:** “Trans March 2022,” “Good News,” and “Lazy Tongue” would appeal to youth. They address bullying, identity, disability, and resiliency.

### Act 2 – Poems to be Performed with Music or Puppetry

Here you will find a QR code at the beginning of the section. The author has created music and atmospheres to go with the poems. There were recorded in a home studio with some atypical instruments, including musical saw, kazoo, Petch’s dog howling, viola, slide dulcimer, and more. There are also two performance videos to be found by QR code, and those are the ones without music.

**Recommended poems for youth:** “Club Q” (about a mass shooting in a queer bar), “3 Minutes in the Closet” (about the experience of a first kiss), “Altar Boy” (about being an altar boy in the 1980s and losing faith), “The Moon Was Lonely Last Night and Kept Me Up” (a love poem to the moon), and “Le Pathetique” (a story about Tchaikovsky’s possible murder).

## Act 3 – Poetic Monologues for Audition

This section is a collection of monologues for audition. The author is a playwright as well as a poet, and they collected monologues from the 4 plays they've written since diving into this form. Trans/Non-Binary and 2Spirit people truly need more resources. Each monologue specifies a list of genders that the piece is appropriate for and, while anyone can perform them, having monologues that help one feel one's self onstage is truly the first step to confidence.

**Recommended poems for youth:** "Ode to Victor," "Things I Stole From my Hospital Jobs," "Daughter of Geppetto – Part I," and "Pegasus' Aria" (which is also an opera piece).

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## History of Spoken Word and Slam

Spoken word poetry has been around since evolution gave us language. Spoken word comes from oral narrative culture. Before we had written language, we had poets, storytellers, and musicians. Spoken word does not need to be written down or given correct grammar, so it is truly poetry of the people. In the past few decades, there has been a rise of interest in spoken word and spoken word artists thanks to platforms like Poetry Slams.

A Poetry Slam is a competition where people write poems that are around three minutes long, and they perform them as a part of a competition. There are 5 judges, who often have just wandered in, and they score the poets between 0.0 and 10.0. Scorekeepers take the top and bottom score away and add up the three in between to determine the winners.

## Exercises for Act 1

### **Lesson One:** Research and Writing.

Read “Lazy Tongue” and “Good News.” Watch the videos online. How does the delivery make you feel? Can you relate to the poet? If you cannot, do you care about what they are saying? Take time to write your own poem with prompts like:

- “How do you sleep at night?”
- “Where I come from.”
- “A letter to 6-year-old me.”

### **Lesson Two:** Editing

Bring in your poem for editing, and work in groups to give feedback. Read the poems aloud, time, them, and ask these questions: What is clear about the piece? What is confusing? What do you want the audience to feel or understand? Is that coming through? Find some online poems via “Slam Find” or “Button Poetry.” Remind your students that they should use their own voices and styles.

### **Lesson Three:** Performance

The poems do not need to be memorized in order to be performed. Let the students who will be reading off screens or pages know to underline or bold or highlight, the lines they will lift their heads to say to the audience. It will help them find their spot on the page when they look back down. Everyone must make eye contact at least once with the audience, or look over their heads. If the audience thinks you don’t need them to pay attention, they won’t, so make eye contact early. Have students perform at least one minute of their three-minute poem and give them tips on performing.

### **Lesson Four:** Open Mic/Poetry Slam!

Have the poets perform their work for the class. If you want to have a Slam, see if there is a Slam organization that might have a host to hire, they really bring lots of

energy and flavor. If you do not and the kids want to do a Poetry Slam, instead of scores (which can break some hearts) let the students vote anonymously on which poet's work they liked the best.

## Questions

1. How is this poetry book unlike other poetry books?
2. What do you feel are some differences between a poem and a spoken word piece?
3. Can you find an example of a spoken word piece that has had some impact on you, or on the world?
4. Name a time when you said something that changed things for you.
5. Who gets to speak? What have you heard to keep you from speaking up?

## Exercises for Act 2

### **Lesson One:** Writing with Music

Read "The Moon Was Lonely Last Night and Kept Me Up" out loud. Then read it out loud again while playing the music from the QR code (it will send you to Bandcamp, where you can find that song). Discuss how music changed the way it was read, or how it could be read differently. Does the music change how you listen? How you perform?

Have the kids pick a song to write to. Encourage them making their own music if they can, it should be instrumental. There are apps that can help them make beats. Take some time to let them find music. Let them listen to it and write at the same time. Do a five-minute timed write. Take the rest of the class to let them work on it. Send this home as homework.

## **Lesson Two:** Discussion, Experimentation, Practice

Have them discuss how the music influenced what they wrote about, or didn't. Have them consider letting the music lead, rather than the poem. Have them give spaces for the music to be as present as part of the poem. It's good to know that spoken word is not a song or a rap. That said, it does have a rhythm, and playing with that rhythm can help an audience pay attention. Have them listen to Gil Scott Heron's "Whitey on the Moon" and discuss both the way the poem uses easy language to appeal to the listener, and also how the music influences the poem's meaning.

Encourage them to practice and get their performance ready for the next lesson. If they are nervous to be in front of the class, let them send it by video to you privately to accommodate. If they want to do some sort of collaboration with someone in the class who makes beats or music, this is also possible.

## **Lesson Three:** Open Mic!

Host an Open Mic, where the students can play off their phones (bring in a speaker for this) and/or do live music while they perform their poems. Encourage them to let the song lead the performance, and to give spaces in the poem delivery so that the music can have its moment. Have them introduce the music as well as the poem title, and speak about why they chose this music. Also have them speak about how the music inspired the poem. Clap hard for everyone. Performing can be super scary! It's important to also mention here that the music should be at around 50% volume to the vocals of 100%. Unlike live music, a poet should not need to shout to be heard over the music, it is a backdrop.

## Questions

1. How did you write your piece and decide on the tune and topic?
2. When you slowed your performance and gave it more space, did it change the way you think about poem delivery?

3. How do you think poetry relates to music?
4. Bob Dylan once got the Nobel Prize for literature, and he only wrote songs. Why do you think a lot of people thought this was wrong, that it should have not gone to a songwriter? What do you think?
5. Did working with this music and your words make you think differently about the music or words? Did one influence the other?

## Exercises for Act 3

### **Lesson One:** Discussion and Selection

Open up this section talking about theatre, and monologue, and how poetry is often found on theatre stages. If you have studied Shakespeare, the students could speak about how his work is considered poetic as well as theatrical. Discuss what makes a monologue poetic, and poetry a monologue. Have them choose a monologue to present from the book. An alternate option is to pick the monologues (so not all are offered) and have them choose from a smaller selection.

### **Lesson Two:** Rehearsal

Find out who picked what and put them into groups according to the monologue. If most of the class chose one monologue, they can either join a smaller group with their next favourite choice, or have multiple groups take on a monologue. Most are very long, so they can be cut up into parts for each student to present. Have them take the time to do this and then to rehearse and get some feedback. Work with each group to do this so they feel more confident to present. Have them also write an intro for the monologue presentation: they can discuss why it was selected, why it's important to them, and why they think it's important for an audience to hear it. Homework is just rehearsal and finalizing the introduction. If they want to go full costume, let them!

This could also be a great excuse to bring in someone who is theatre-based, or buddy up with the theatre kids for feedback and preparation.

**Lesson Three:** You guessed it, another open mic!

Groups showcase their monologue interpretations, as well as the intros they crafted. This would also be so impactful to include in an assembly if there happened to be one coming up. Some people will really shine in ways that weren't expected, and it would be great to give them the feeling one can only get onstage.

Remind the kids that they are not in competition with each other, they are in support of each other and improving skills as individuals. More artists, more art, more performers and engaged speakers.