

**Lesson:** Hold a Poetry Festival

**Opening Statement:**

A festival is another name for a series (more than one) related performances. This festival would be about Paul Laurence Dunbar and his poetry. The students should read and know many of his poems.

**Standards Achieved:**

English Language Arts  
Social Studies Skills

**Grade:** 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade and up

**Knowledge Objectives:**

Students will learn:

Poetry festivals incorporate many different kinds of poetry.  
A festival brings a school together.  
A festival is a series of related performances.  
There are many different kinds of festivals.

**Skill Objective:**

Students will learn:

How to stand up in front of an audience and recite to a group.  
The steps for organizing an event.  
How to work together.

**Procedure:**

1. Explain to the students that a festival is another name for a series (more than one) related performances.
2. Give examples. Cite different festivals that happen in Dayton or your community. (music, dance, and art festivals)
3. Explain that the students will participate in and plan a festival that features the poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar and their own ABC or Acrostic poetry.
4. Explain to the students the class will be organizing a poetry festival for students and parents to come to.
5. Explain to the students that everyone will participate: some reading their own ABC or Acrostic poetry and some reading Paul Laurence Dunbar poetry.
6. Divide the class into three groups. Tell the class that each group will have specific duties: production, advertising, and clean up.
7. Explain that advertising will distribute posters announcing the events and tickets to the event; production will make the posters and the tickets; and clean up will gather supplies to make the posters and tickets and clean up areas afterward.
8. Have the entire class make the following decisions:
  - a. Which Paul Laurence Dunbar poems to recite.
  - b. What poster and ticket colors will be.

- c. Where posters should be placed.
  - d. The kinds of (other) school and community advertisements which might be helpful.
  - e. The wording of invitations to family and friends.
9. You, the teacher, will decide which students will recite the poetry that they have written (ABS or Acrostic) and which child or children serve as master(s) of ceremonies.
  10. Ask the committees to complete the assigned tasks.

**Tips to Remember:**

- This is a good project for parent involvement, have several help you supervise the event.
- The day of the event, have two students at the door, one ripping tickets in half, the other holding the ticket stubs in a box.
- Have your students count the stubs afterwards to ascertain how many people attended.
- You will have to choose a date early and reserve the school auditorium.
- Remember to build in a “dress rehearsal” time into the festival preparation schedule. Students will need to practice being in front of an audience.

## THE SPELLIN'-BEE

I never shall furgit that night when father hitched up Dobbin,  
An' all us youngsters clambered in an' down the road went bobbin'  
To school where we kep; at work in every kind o' weather,  
But where that night a spellin'-bee was callin' us together.

'Twas one o' Heaven's banner nights, the stars was all a glitter,  
The moon was shinin' like the hand o' God had jest then lit her.  
The ground was white with spotless snow, the blast was sort o' stingin'  
But underneath our round-about, you bet our hearts was singin'.

That spellin'-bee had be'n the talk o' many a precious moment,  
The youngsters all was wild to see jes' what the precious show meant,  
An' we whose years was in their teens was little less desirous  
O' gittin' to the meetin' so's out sweethearts could admire us.

So on we went so anxious fur to satisfy our mission  
That father had to box our ears, to smother our ambition.  
But boxin' ears was too short work to hinder, cur arrivin',  
He jest turned round' an' smacked us all, an' kep' right on a-arivin'.

Well, soon the schoolhouse hove in sight, the winders beamin' brightly;  
The sound o' talkin' reached our ears, and voices laffin' lightly.  
It puffed us up so full an' big 'at I'll jest bet a dollar,  
There wa' n't a feller there but felt the strain upon his collar.

So down we jumped an' in we went ez sprightly ez you make 'em,  
But somethin' grabbed us by the knees an' straight began to shake 'em.  
Fur once within that lighted room, our feelin's took a canter,  
An' scurried to the zero mark ez quick ez Tam O'Shanter.

'Cause there was crowds o' people there, both sexes an' all stations;  
It looked like all the town had come an' brought all their relations.  
The first I saw was Nettie Gray, I thought that girl was dearer  
"N" fold; an' when I got a chance, you bet I aided up near her.

An' Farmer Dobbs's girl was there, the one 'at Jim was sweet on,  
An' Cyrus Jones an' Mandy Smith an' Faith an' Patience Deaton.  
Then Parson Brown an' Lawyer Jones were present – all attention,  
An' piles on piles of other folks too numerous to mention.

The master rose an' briefly said: "Good friends, dear brother Crawford,  
"To spur the pupils' minds along, a little prize has offered.  
To him who spells the best to-night – or 't may be 'her' – no tellin' –  
He offers ex a just reward, this precious work on spellin'."  
A little blue-backed spellin'-book with fancy scarlet trimmin';  
We boys devoured it with our eyes – so did the girls an' women.  
He held it up where all could see, then on the table set it,  
An' ev'ry speller in the house felt mortal bound to get it.

At his command we fell in line, prepared to do our dooty,  
Outspell the rest an' set 'em down, an' carry home the booty.  
'T' was they the merry times began, the blunders, an' the laffin',  
The nudges an' the nods an' winks an' stale good-natured chaffin'.

Ole Uncle Hiram Dane was there, the closest man a-livin',  
Whose only bugbear seemed to be the dreadful fear o' givin'.  
His beard was long, his hair uncut, his clothes all bare an' dingy;  
It was n't 'cause the man was pore, but jest so mortal stingy;

An' these he sot by Sally Riggs a-smilin' an' a-smirkin',  
An' all his children lef' to home a diggin' an' a-workin'.  
But Lawyer Jones of all gone men did shorely look the fonest,  
When he found out that h'd furgot to put the "h" in "honest."

An' Parson Brown, whose sermons were too long fur toleration,  
Caused lots o' smiles by missin' when they give out "condensation."  
So one by one they giv' it up – the big words kep' a-landin',  
Till me an' Nettie Gray was left, the only ones a-standin',

An' then my inward strife began – I guess my mind was petty—  
I did so want that spellin'-book; but then to spell down Nettie  
Jest sort o' went ag'in my grain – I somehow could n't do it,  
An' when I git a notion fixed, I'm great on stickin' to it.

So when they giv' the next word out – I had n't orter tell it,  
But then 'w was all fur Nettie's sake – I missed so's she could spell it.  
She spelt the word, then looked at me so lovin'-like an' mello',  
I tell you 't sent a hundred pins a shootin' through a fello'.

O' course I had to stand the jokes an' chaffin' of the fello's,  
But when they handed her the book I vow I was n't jealous.  
We sung a hymn, an' Parson Brown dismissed us like he orter,  
Fur, la! He'd learned a thing er two an' made his blessin shorter.

'T was late an' cold when we got out, but Nettie liked cold weather,  
An' do did I, so we agreed we'd jest walk home together.  
We both wuz silent, fur of words we nuther had a surplus,  
'Till she spoke out quite sudden like, "You missed that word on purpose."

Well, I declared it frightened me; at first I tried denyin',  
But Nettie, she jest smiled an' smiled, she knowed that I was lyin'.  
Sez she: "That book is yourn by right;" sez I: "It never could be –  
I – I – you – ah –" an' there I stuck, an' well she understood me.  
So we agreed that later on when age had giv' us tether,  
We'd jine our lots an' settle down to own that book together.

Paul Laurence Dunbar  
1872 – 1906