



January 15, 2015

To whom it may concern:

As an eighth grade English teacher at Summit Middle School in Boulder, Colorado, I am writing in recognition of Ted Weissberg and the poetry organization he has created, Row Cypher.

Ted worked with my class in the months of November and December, introducing the concept of a “poetry slam” to the advanced eighth graders in my English IV class (the top English class at Summit). The students are all well above-average in reading competency and writing ability, but the concept of a freestyle poetry slam was new and liberating for them. Ted demonstrated a few examples of spoken-word poetry, showing how a poem could be written in five minutes. He reassured the more nervous students by his spontaneous performances and by being willing to risk embarrassment himself. My students were then inspired to write their own poems with the goal of performance. Some students used the opportunity to be silly, while others were more thoughtful and serious--I was impressed by the varied tones the students adopted for their poems.

Ted unobtrusively observed what my students were writing, and I was gratified he singled out one student for praise, being sure to ask him share via performance; this student took a quotation we had studied and developed the concept addressed into a poem which we all found striking.

My students have had extensive training in essay writing, but I greatly appreciated Ted’s help in developing creative writing skills. His approach is non-threatening and entertaining. Ted is a dynamic presence in the room, and my students enjoyed the break in routine from my much quieter, more laid-back approach.

I believe Ted Weissberg and his program showed my students a side of poetry they may not have been aware existed, therefore expanding their horizons and opening them up to new ways to appreciate poetry. We all benefited from Ted’s visit, and I heartily recommend Ted and Row Cypher to any organization looking for such results.

Sincerely,

Benjamin Davenport  
Summit Middle School