

Am I a Black Poet?

I transformed from a Black gyrl to a Black

Am I a Black poet... or a poet that's Black? Whew, that question used to spin in my mind like a record on repeat. Back in my baby-poet days, I thought it was deep — heavy even—but maturity, history, and a whole lot of lived experience have shown me the answer was always simple.

See... reading and writing in our community aren't just hobbies. They're survival skills. They're inheritance. They're the whispered prayers of ancestors who weren't allowed to read or write — yet somehow wrote their way into all of us.

I was 13 the first time I stepped to a mic, a quiet little tween with more thoughts than volume, and discovered I could empty my heart in rhythm and rhyme (or no rhyme at all) and the audience would clap as I'd just done something holy.

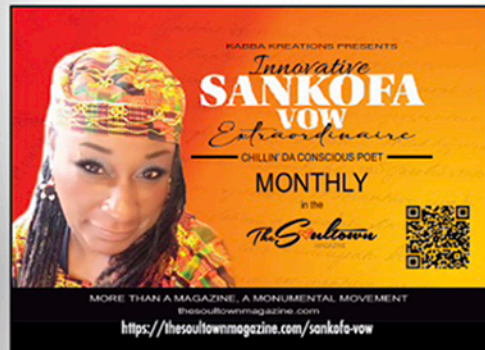
Music raised me. Lyrics raised me higher. I learned songs like some kids learned multiplication tables — pulling apart metaphors, tasting the syllables, letting rhyme dance in my mouth before I even knew I was falling in love with poetry.

By the time I grew into a Spoken Word artist, I realized everybody could throw a metaphor, but not everybody could flip a multi-syllable rhyme like a gymnast landing a perfect ten. So I trained. I practiced. I polished that muscle until language itself felt like a living drum beneath my feet.

Then life got real. I was a child of the Black National Movement — but uprooted at age twelve and replanted smack-dab in Cedar Falls, Iowa, an all-white town in the 80s where culture shock hit me like a cold wind off the cornfields. But guess what kept me standing? Or rather, who?

Gil Scott-Heron. Maya Angelou. Nikki Giovanni. Their words wrapped around me like armor. While other kids skipped class to go smoke, I skipped class to hide in the school library, falling

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headfirst into Walt Whitman, Judy Blume, and yes — even Robert Frost. They soothed my tween insecurities for a moment, but the Black poets? They spoke to my life. To my skin. To my forever.

Or a Poet that's Black?

woman when my spit was deemed legit!

Gil Scott-Heron's Small Talk at 125th & Lenox? Listen... that book baptized me in rhythm. I read those poems over and over until the pages memorized me. He told stories using rhyme like a heartbeat, and I thought, "Oh... that's what I want to do." So I started telling mine.

At home, we were taught to speak clearly, to enunciate like we were born for microphones, so I braided all that into my first classroom performance. The applause shocked me — and delighted me — and I realized my silence wasn't made for staying. Not if I wanted that A in Oral Comm.

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But even as I built my voice, I kept wondering: Am I a Black poet? Or a poet that's Black? Because I already knew people judge everything — your shoes, your hair, your phone, your walk. So imagine their judgment on a Black girl spitting poems in an all-white classroom.

I chose every word carefully. Dictionary on the desk. Thesaurus under the pillow. New vocabulary is added daily, like vitamins. I wanted applause — I won't lie — but I did not wish for eye rolls, boos, or whispers. So I changed my speech. I adapted for the mic. While other teens felt peer pressure from drinking or

stealing, or sneaking out, my peer pressure was the microphone. And I needed to make it proud.

My writing grew deeper, fuller, more intentional. What used to spill out raw and rebellious became language laced with purpose. As my vocabulary expanded, so did my identity. Every word became a brick in a legacy I refused to let crumble.

I refined my diction. Sharpened my cadence. Cut out needless profanity and tired slang — not to censor myself, but to elevate myself. To stretch my voice across generations, not limit it to a moment.

Because somewhere in the shift from expression to impact, I felt my voice transform — rooted in culture, strengthened by history, polished by storytellers who transcended time.

And today? I say it with my full chest, both hands open, ten toes on solid ground: I am a Black poet ... AND ... A poet that's Black. A woman shaped by rhythm, raised by revolution, and committed to telling the truth — in whatever rhyme it arrives. And there is no going back.

I transformed from a Black gyrl to a Black woman when my spit was deemed legit!

I'm Chillin, Publisher and Innovative Extraordinaire for The Soultown Magazine. I want to thank all Black Poets and all Poets who are Black for having Soul! ☺

