



Kate

Tempest

2020 Teachers Resource

New Zealand
Festival OF THE ARTS

Curriculum Links

Music, English

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[Download SchoolFest 101 here.](#) Your guide to make the most of the festival experience.

CAST AND CREATIVES

Kate Tempest katetempest.co.uk (United Kingdom)

Kate Tempest grew up in South-East London, where she still lives. She started out as a rapper, toured the spoken word circuit for a number of years, and now works as a poet and playwright too. Her work includes *Balance*, her first album with her band Sound of Rum, *Everything Speaks in its Own Way*, her first collection of poems, published on her own imprint Zingaro, which comes with a CD and DVD of live performance; *GlassHouse*, a forum theatre play for Cardboard Citizens; and the plays *WASTED* (Methuen Drama) and *Hopelessly Devoted* for new writing theatre company Paines Plough.

Her epic poem *Brand New Ancients* (Picador) won both the Ted Hughes Prize for innovation in poetry and a Herald Angel Award. After a sell out show at St Anne's Warehouse, Brooklyn, *Brand New Ancients* received a rave review in the New York Times and came to international attention. She continues to work with music, and featured on the track *Our Town*, a collaboration with producer duo letthemusicplay (Greco-Roman.) She also featured on the track *Hot Night Cold Spaceship* (Speedy Wunderground) and has collaborated with Sinead O'Connor, Damien Dempsey and Bastille.

Her debut solo album came out on Big Dada in 2014, which she made with acclaimed music producer Dan Carey. She has performed at Glastonbury and all major UK festivals, as well as performing internationally. She sold out the Old Vic Theatre in London for the launch of *Everything Speaks...* and has appeared on BBC TV and radio many times performing her poems. She has been commissioned to write for The Royal Shakespeare Company, Amnesty International, Barnardo's and Channel 4 Television.

Her debut novel *The Bricks That Built the Houses* was a Sunday Times bestseller and won the 2017 Books Are My Bag Readers Award for Breakthrough Author. Her albums *Everybody Down* (2014) and *Let Them Eat Chaos* (2016) have been nominated for the Mercury Music Prize. The latter's accompanying poetry book (also titled *Let Them Eat Chaos*) was nominated for the 2018 Costa Book of the Year in the Poetry Category. She was nominated as Best Female Solo Performer at the 2018 Brit Awards.

Her latest album *The Book Of Traps And Lessons* came out June 2019.

ABOUT THE SHOW

Is Kate Tempest a rapper, a poet, a spoken word artist or a lit fuse? Whatever she is, she's undeniably intent on delivering urgent messages that cut through apathy like a honed knife.

Since starting out doing open mic gigs at 16, Tempest has released four albums, five poetry collections and one novel, performing to cult-like crowds around the world. Her shows are a barrage of profundity and dazzling rhythms with phrasing that sounds both Shakespearean and straight-up.

Tempest's work is, in part, a call to action capturing "the angry tension of being alive" in today's precarious world (The Guardian). She wants us to learn from the past in order to confront an uncertain future.

GENRE

“Spoken Word is poetry intended for onstage performance, rather than exclusively designed for the page. While often associated with hip-hop culture, it also has strong ties to storytelling, modern poetry, post-modern performance, and monologue theatre, as well as jazz, blues, and folk music. Due to its immediacy and direct rapport with its audience, this type of poetry often contains references to current events and issues relevant to a contemporary audience. At its best, Spoken Word is a powerful, high-energy form of expression that attracts artists and audiences of all ages from a wide range of disciplines and socio-cultural backgrounds.”

(From [Urban Dictionary](#))

PRODUCTION AND TECHNIQUES

MUSIC AND POETRY

Kate Tempest’s poems are meant to be performed. In the front of the book *Let Them Eat Chaos* she writes “this poem is meant to be read aloud”. This harks back to the oral tradition of poetry – which was from the very earliest of times the only way of communicating poetry, it also references the traditions and forms of contemporary hip-hop and rap which is intrinsically performative. Reading poetry aloud reveals many of the devices hidden within the text, as well as implying an active audience, grouped together, listening.

“When spoken word is performed it gives greater insight and a humanised experience which forces the audience to not only engage in the content of the poems but also the person behind the words.” Action Education Stations ‘Spoken Word Guidelines, 2019

Tempest performs with minimal backing, from hip hop and electronic beats to touches of strings, synth and piano. Some tracks are entirely spoken word with no backing.

CONTEXT

Kate Tempest’s work is written for live performance and also released as recordings and books in a more conventional poetry format. Kate says about the published version of *Let Them Eat Chaos* “This is not a transcript of the album, but a companion to it, in the same way that the text of *Brand New Ancients* works as a companion to a performance piece. I enjoyed the challenges of asking the page to support the words and asking the words to support themselves without music. I hope the poem works as a poem, and holds its own.” Read an extract of *Let Them Eat Chaos* [here](#). Listen to that extract interpreted and performed live (as the track *Perfect Coffee*) [here](#).

THEMES

Empathy and the life of the city are key themes in Kate Tempest’s work. Speaking about issues ranging from internet trolls, social exclusion, racism, alienation, class, the climate crisis...she confronts the issues of our times.

Influences

"My first point of contact with literature was through hip-hop," she tells *The Independent* (UK) "The first time words really meant something to me properly was through Wu-Tang [the multi-platinum selling rap group]. From engaging with those words it became easier for me to engage with texts. I understood poetry, I started understanding what I could get from novels." She also states William Blake, Lauryn Hill, Shakespeare, Sylvia Plath, John Coltrane and Roots Manuva as some of her influences.

FURTHER RESOURCES AND READINGS

Video

Kate Tempest's NPR's Tiny Desk concert: youtube.com/watch?v=Xqd86is7y54

Find live performances, readings, interviews and more on Kate Tempest's YouTube channel: youtube.com/channel/UCds3t8SvEFkiqXWwVli9IQg

Read

"She is one of the brightest talents around. Her spoken-word performances have the metre and craft of traditional poetry, the kinetic agitation of hip-hop and the intimacy of a whispered heart-to-heart... Tempest deals bravely with poverty, class and consumerism. She does so in a way that not only avoids the pitfalls of sounding trite, but manages to be beautiful too, drawing on ancient mythology and sermon cadence to tell stories of the everyday" Kate Tempest is interviewed by the Guardian: theguardian.com/books/2013/apr/10/kate-tempest-performance-poet-cant-be-ignored

Listen

Hear Kate Tempest's poems being read aloud on the Poetry Archive: poetryarchive.org/poet/kate-tempest/

Stream Kate Tempest's new Album *The Book of Traps and Lessons*: katetempest.ink.to/TBOTALWe

Go Further

Find out about spoken word performers closer to home in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

[Vanessa Crofskey](#) and Jahra 'Rager' Wasasala are two spoken word poets mentioned in this roundup from the Spinoff: thespinoff.co.nz/books/13-02-2018/the-tuesday-poets/

Jahara 'Rager' Wasasala is speaking as part of the Festival conference [Talanoa Mau](#), listen to her speak about her identity at TEDx Auckland: youtube.com/watch?v=YBqm7hTHCpg

Get your hands on a copy of *Solid Air: Australian and New Zealand Spoken Word* published by University of Queensland Press: uqp.uq.edu.au/Book.aspx/1508/Solid%20Air-%20Australian%20and%20New%20Zealand%20Spoken%20Word

Watch this video of Zimbabwe-born Takunda Muzondiwa tell an Auckland audience "Yesterday I was African, today I am lost,": theguardian.com/global/video/2019/jun/01/new-zealand-schoolgirls-spoken-word-poem-about-racism-clocks-half-a-million-views-video

Explore the opportunities NZ Poetry Slam have for young people: newzealandpoetryslam.com/youth.html

Interested in teaching spoken word in your classroom? Download Action Education's excellent *Spoken Word Guidelines 2019*: actioneducation.co.nz/resources.html

PROVOCATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

PRE-FESTIVAL

Read some excerpts of Kate Tempest's poetry (poems can be found online and in the links on the previous page). Discuss the themes and poetic devices used. Talk about the history of poetry as an oral form, how does this relate to our perception of poetry now?

Think of a poem or song that created a strong emotional response in you. Write down the title and explain your reaction to it. What was it about the work that evoked this response?

What are you expecting to see when you go to the performance? What are you excited about? Is there anything you are apprehensive about?

AT THE FESTIVAL

What sense of energy do I feel in the space? What do I notice about the stage before the performance has even begun?

What captures my attention during the performance? Why?

What questions do I have about the production? What is Kate Tempest trying to communicate?

AFTER THE FESTIVAL

What were some of the thoughts you had during the performance?

How did the performance make you feel?

What did you enjoy about the performance? Is there anything you didn't enjoy?

Was Kate Tempest a good performer? Did she have stage presence?

How did she use expression, pacing, volume and movement to enhance the impact of her performance? What effects do these have?

What are some of the themes in Kate Tempest's poems? How did she communicate these to the audience?

How was music used to enhance the words of the poetry?

How was it different seeing this performance live, other than watching a video or listen to the song on headphones and speakers?

Find one of Kate Tempest's poems online. Read it over once, silently in your head. Read it aloud to someone. How did the poem change when you spoke and performed it? What was revealed?

Need something more? Contact your SchoolFest team with any questions about the performance.

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