

## As long as I still can dance...

Written by Titilayo Bediako  
Thursday, 28 May 2009 14:17

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DeJauntae Boswell

(L-R) Ranea Hester, Erika Burns and Todd Riser

Nonprofit organizations from Minneapolis and St. Paul joined together to sponsor a poetry and spoken word Contest for students. The collaboration between WE WIN Institute, Arts Us, and Illuminadas Performing Arts lead to a dynamic event on Thursday, May 14. The contest was held at Dunning Recreational Center in St. Paul.

WE WIN Institute is committed to the academic and social success of all children. WE WIN uses African and African American history and culture as a method to assist young people in being successful in school and in life.

Illuminda is dedicated to making performing arts accessible to underserved Minnesota communities. Arts and education programming is developed for and presented to youth and families at risk, the deaf and hard of hearing, communities of color and survivors of domestic abuse and sexual assault.

Arts-Us develops young leaders in and through the arts by providing high-quality African diaspora arts programs for youth to help them develop knowledge and skills in the arts.

Spoken word artists and poets judged a Twin Cities-wide contest. The names of those who submitted poems or spoken word entries were covered to assure equity for all contestants. The pieces were judged for creativity, quality of the art form and the ability to address the themes of the contest, which included: Peace begins at home, how can I make a difference in the world, and how can I change the world? The winners received cash prizes and read their original works in front of an audience of over 100 students, parents and community members.

Several of WE WIN Institute's students attending its Rites of Passage program took top honors. Fourth grader DeJauntae Boswell took second place in the elementary category for his poem entitled "How to Change the World." WE WIN Institute students took all the top honors in the middle school category. Sixth grade student, Erika Burns took first place for her poem, "Peace." Seventh grader, Todd Riser won second place for his poem, "How?" Sixth grade poet, Ranea Hester won third place for her original poem entitled, "Dance." All three winners are from Olson Middle School in North Minneapolis, DeJauntae Boswell attends Sullivan in South Minneapolis.

Erika Burns and Ranea Hester are part of a special education program called CLASS. It is a program for students who have the greatest difficulties academically and socially. Through WE WIN's Rites of Passage program they have learned nothing can stop them from being successful if they remain committed to giving their best. Many CLASS students don't believe they are capable of competing at the same level as students in mainstream classes. The success of Erika and Todd shows that they do can be successful academically and socially.

Erika Burns, a sixth grader, took first place with her poem "Peace." Erika was also a contestant

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in the Black Storyteller and Black Excellence contest this past year. She has recited the readings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Sojourner Truth. Watch for Erika Burns in the future as an inspiring author and playwright.

Todd Riser is a seventh grader in the R.O.P. program at Olson Middle School, he was the second place winner in the fifth through eighth grade category. Todd was the first to submit his poem and application. Todd is quiet and loves to read; this young man strives for Black excellence in everything he does. Todd's poem "How," showed his strength as a young poet.

Third place winner, sixth grader Ranea Hester, was all smiles when asked to read his poem "Dance" at the program. Not expecting to win anything because of his shyness, his only concern was to hurry home to feed his cat.

All of the students that entered their poems received a certificate of participation. Some of them got to perform their work in front of the audience. Even though they weren't place winners, all of them have the hearts of winners.

Dance  
BY RANEA HESTER

I WILL STOP LOOKING BACK  
WITH REGRETS  
OR LOOKING FORWARD  
WITH FEAR  
AND GIVE THE BEST I HAVE TODAY  
WHILE I STILL CAN DANCE

I WILL ALWAYS TREAT OTHERS  
WITH DIGNITY, HONOR, AND RESPECT  
I HOPE YOU KNOW  
THAT IN MY HEART AND DREAMS  
NOTHING CAN CHANGE ME  
AS LONG AS I CAN STILL DANCE

I WILL DO ALL THAT I CAN  
WITH WHATEVER I HAVE  
WHEREVER I AM  
I'LL LET GOOD ENOUGH BE  
GOOD ENOUGH  
AS LONG AS I CAN STILL DANCE