



FLINT CITY AREA'S FIRST POET LAUREATE

SEMAJ BROWN

November 1, 2019

Dear Flint and Friends of Flint:


85% of juveniles who collide with the court system are functionally illiterate. 67%, of adult prison inmates cannot read. Poor children hear 30 million fewer words than their wealthier peers by the age of 5. In other words, the relationship is direct between not knowing how to read, and being incarcerated. FACT: Literate people live longer. Literate communities are healthier, and the literate are less likely to be impoverished. The 2018 3rd grade literacy scores dropped 75% to 11% literacy when compared to five years before the onset of the Flint Water Crisis.

On September 27th at the Flint Public Library, during the close of my *Bleeding Fire!* poetry reading, a proclamation from Mayor Dr. Karen Weaver, presented by Dr. Pamela Pugh, Director of Health Services was delivered. I received the venerable honor of being appointed, Flint City Area's First Poet Laureate. Amid the glow and excitement, an elder, a woman who was a retired teacher took my hand. She spoke, "You know, you're a baad sister, powerful! You know, we could turn this thing around. We could turn this WHOLE thing around." It was a surreal moment, watching her arm wave as if she was directing energy. Something shifted. She looked beyond. Her eyes were like marbles swirling history forward.

Flint, I believe her; I know we can turn this whole thing around. I know about the seemingly impenetrable, constructed social barriers. I know. There has always been classism, sexism, heterosexism, racism, ableism, ageism, and more. I know. But, I also know that nothing, nothing can stop the will of well-organized enthused, and determined Flintstones!

Today, I introduce the **Poetry Pod Project — the POD (Poetry on Demand)**. I imagine the City of Flint as a living pod bursting with possibility. Have you ever seen a pea pod that was so plump, green and full of potential? That's us! In this pod, there is poetry. Poetry is a key to increased literacy. I see Flint as a Poetry Pod that grows a literate, healthy community. It is time for the Poetry Pod to open, and yield an environment where poetry is read, written, and spoken. Flint powered by Poetry!

The power of poetry is real. A poem can enter your mind and explode how you feel. Poems are words arranged into a healing life force of self-expression, self-determination, and reflection. In our Flint Poetry Pod, we speak poetry because we are poetry. **We are the creative imagination of our futures.** We understand that thought is the poetic spark from which all disciplines arise. There is poetry in a painting, and in the curl of sculpture. Song is poetry. Dance is poetry. And then, there is the math of poetry: $PL = 1(SB)$ to the power of FLINT.



The Flint Poetry Pod, Poetry on Demand (P.O.D.), is comprehensive, multi-disciplinary programming designed by Flint City Area's First Poet Laureate, Semaj Brown. The POD makes evident through varied modalities the facility of poetry to enhance literacy and health while stirring appreciation and understanding of art and science. Poetry advances the quality of life of citizenry when organized as a precious power tool.

In the Poetry Pod, vocabulary and synonym games transform the landscape. *Writing and Reading Warriors* expand The POD. Classics are consumed and dramatized. Reading is fun! Poet in Residence pods are deployed throughout Flint. Power terms are exchanged in a new value system that champions words to a level of currency. Writing is fun! The PLSB (Poet Laureate Semaj Brown), website is a pod of information and communication where *Goodnight Poetry* is a video bedtime story. *Poetry Pod* pen pals are formed across neighborhoods, and nations. The Poetry Pod is a safe innovative place to learn, to remediate, and to invent twenty-first century language. But first, The Flint Poetry Pod must open.

I see Poetry Pods beaming with energy, bursting forth! Light, is shining through the prism of your eyes, Flint. We are being called to the open mic of enlightenment. We are Calling: the griot story tellers, rock star retirees, teachers, ministers, writers, CEOs, rappers, tech folk, songsters, scientists, workers, social workers, students, professors, cousins, institutions, corporations, non-profits, businesses, foundations, celebrities, and philanthropists. We are calling you to become Poetry Pod builders. We are calling you to transmit rays of hope, resources, and skill. We are calling you to make Poetry History— endow the legacy of literacy! You, Know, we will turn this whole thing around.

Semaj Brown,
Flint City Area's First Poet Laureate