

Flint Poet Laureate Closes Out Innovative Academy of American Poets Fellowship with Two Local Collaborative Events

On June 3, 2021, Semaj Brown, Flint's inaugural Poet Laureate, was named one of 23 Poets Laureate Fellows by the Academy of American Poets, made possible with funds from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Since that time, Brown has fashioned events and programs not only in her adopted town of Flint, but across Michigan and the United States, establishing poetry partnerships with students at all levels, from elementary to university, and adults. Rooted in her Poetry Pod Project (P3), an initiative meant to spread literacy as far as possible, Brown and her collaborators, Zeta Foundation-Flint, Mott-Warsh Collection, Freeman Elementary, Peoples Church of Flint, The Ron Allen Project, The "New" McCree Theatre, *The Flint Courier News*, and the Flint Chapter Pierians Inc., explored unique cohorts, including "Flint Reads Poetry" and "Poetry Paints."

As her fellowship comes to a close, two of Brown's many P3 projects are coming to fruition this month, both on Wednesday, May 18, 2022.

"Poetry Paints: Ekphrastic Writing," Brown's collaboration with Flint's Mott-Warsh Collection (Stephanie James, Director, Curator, & Collection Educator) and the students of Freeman Elementary, under the direction of Principal Anna Johnson, with technical support from Librarian Rebecca Robertson, will make its debut at 1:30 p.m. EST via Zoom. To view the summary of their collective voices, please visit <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2840424562> Meeting ID: 284 042 4562

Ekphrastic writing is commentary on a work or works of visual art. The fifth and sixth grade students, guided by Brown, created a collaborative poem based on pieces in the private collection of fine art created by artists of the African diaspora and those who reflect on such. The poem drew special inspiration from *Patron Saint of Middle Passengers* by Mark Steven Greenfield. James and the Collection's Gallery Assistant Janice McCoy were instrumental in this phase of P3, as were community partners Zeta Foundation-Flint, in alliance with chapter Zeta Beta Zeta of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. The Zetas will present the young creatives, now known as The Freeman Poets, with gifts, including writing implements, books from Brown's Poet Laureate Library, Mott-Warsh-related materials, and a certificate of completion, reflecting their literary achievement.

An electronic summary of "Poetry Paints: Ekphrastic Writing," which will include lessons, worksheets, an image of the artwork created by Greenfield from which the students worked, and the collaborative poems created during this project, is currently being compiled by Brown. She hopes to share it with other educators at the Michigan Council of Teachers of English (MCTE) when she speaks at its 100th Anniversary luncheon as its keynote on October 14, 2022. A new volume of Brown's poetry is slated for publication by Wayne State University Press by the close

of this year.

Later that evening, Brown, along with others from Peoples Church of Flint, will present “Flint Reads Poetry: Early Allies - Transcendentalist Poetry” at 7 p.m. EST via Zoom. Coined by German critic and philosopher Friedrich Schlegel, transcendental poetry is that “whose One and All is the relationship of the ideal and the real.” Drawing on the work of poets such as Elizabeth Palmer Peabody and Walt Whitman, readers will explore the transcendentalists while linking back to the work of Brown.