**Poetry from Daily Life: Poems can teach kids strength, resilience**

By Nile Stanley

*This week’s guest on Poetry in Daily Life is Nile Stanley, PhD, who lives in Jacksonville, Florida. A teacher educator, artist-in-residence, and researcher, for thirty-six years he has been on a mission to show how poetry can take on a bigger role within the teaching of reading and the development of resilience. Nile and I have collaborated on interviews, articles, books, and poetry shows at conferences. A couple of unique facts about Nile: he was a jazz radio DJ at the University of Delaware and a newspaper columnist for the Portales Tribune in New Mexico. ~ David L. Harrison*

**Poetry helps build resilience into your dream**

“I have a dream.” You have heard the line. But what you may not know is that the poetry of Langston Hughes influenced Martin Luther King Jr.’s best-known speech, which he delivered during the 1963 March on Washington. Poetry influences children, too, not only to learn to read but it can also make them feel more resilient because it often contains themes of strength, perseverance, and the ability to overcome challenges. I know this from personal experience as well as from extensive research.

Similarly, storytelling is a powerful approach known as bibliotherapy that can help develop resilience. Reading the stories of others who have overcome adversity can provide the knowledge we can use to bounce back from tough times and learn to thrive, yet to dream once again. One such inspirational story is one of my former Black fourth-grade students who learned the skill of performing poetry with the help of caring teachers who believed in him.

Moses Lee Jones grew up in poverty without a mother and father. He was labeled special education and frequently was angry and acting out in class. Fortunately, his school was chosen to become a partner with the University of North Florida and the children received one-on one tutoring by education majors and participated in Poetry Stars, a literacy-through-the-arts program funded by the Cummer Family Foundation.

On the day of his “screen test” to become a Poetry Star, Moses was the only boy who auditioned. To make the cut he would be required to perform two poems from memory. He wore a white shirt and black tie for his audition because his grandmother, who it turns out he took care of, told him to “show” his best. As I said, “action, camera,” in tears, Moses told me his father, who he rarely saw, was just arrested. The following poem I authored captures the emotional and inspirational outcome of Mose’s audition.

**MOSES LEE JONES**

*by Nile Stanley*

Moses Lee Jones

came to poetry club today

wearing a black tie and white shirt.

I say.” Moses, what is it? A special occasion?”

“No sir,

las’ night they took my daddy away

and I don’t want it to git in the way

of the poetry.”

With a smile a mile wide

and teeth gleaming

Moses recites from “Dreams” by Langston Hughes.

*Hold fast to dreams*

*For when dreams die*

*Life is a broken-winged bird*

*That cannot fly.*

*Hold fast to dreams*

*For when dreams go*

*Life is a barren field*

*Frozen with snow.*

Moses Lee Jones

Is holdin’ fast.

He’s holdin' fast

to dreams!

❖❖❖

Moses passed his audition with excellence. He became a Poetry Star, part of an elite performance team of ten girls. The school’s grade eventually improved from a D to a B. Moses was one of the lucky ones and went onto graduate from high school and ROTC. He grew up to become a sergeant recruiter for the US. Marines. Does poetry make a difference? It made a difference for Martin Luther King and Moses Lees Jones. Poetry can make a difference too for you and your children, school, and community.

*Dr. Nile Stanley is an associate professor in the Department of Teaching Learning and Curriculum at the College of Education and Human Services at the University of North Florida. He is a founding board member of Hope at Hand, Inc., a nonprofit organization that produces the annual Jacksonville poetry festival and provides poetry lessons for vulnerable and at-risk youth. Learn more about him at* [*https://www.unf.edu/newsroom/2023/06/Graffiti-Poetry.html*](https://www.unf.edu/newsroom/2023/06/Graffiti-Poetry.html). *“Moses Lee Jones “ © 2004 by Nile Stanley from Creating Readers with Poetry, published by Maupin House. “Dreams” by Langston Hughes from the © 1994 Collected Works of Langston Hughes. Used by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, a Division of Random House.*