

ROOTED & RADICAL (R&R) OFFICIAL RULES*

*Official rules as of **October 16, 2025**

QUALIFICATIONS FOR PARTICIPATION

- Participants must be 19 years old or younger on the day of our kickoff event and enrolled in a high school or GED program.
- Participants on school teams must be enrolled in that institution and not yet graduated within that academic year.
- Participants must be sponsored by a school or community organization. Indy poets must be sponsored by a mentor or coach who works at a school or community organization.

TEAM MEMBERSHIP

- Poets who wish to compete as members of an R&R team must register with their school team. If poets do not have an active R&R team at their school, they are eligible to join a Community Organization Team or can choose to work with Young Chicago Authors or a community organization to start a poetry slam team at their school.
- We acknowledge that schools are, at times, unsafe spaces for some of our participants. If a student feels unsafe on their school team, there will be a process that will seek to restore safety on the school team for that student, and if at the end of the restorative process, the student continues to feel unsafe on their school team, they are welcome to join a community organization R&R team.

TEAM REGISTRATION, BOUTS, & ADVANCEMENT

- Teams must consist of the same poets whose names are on the team roster. If you have changes to your roster, R&R organizers must be notified as soon as possible.
- There must be a minimum of four people on each team, a maximum of ten. No alternates. All 10 members are eligible to perform during R&R bouts to the coach's discretion. Teams may register up to 3 additional poets as indys who will be scheduled to perform in separate bouts than the team.

Bout Structure for Preliminary Bouts

- Each team must participate in two Preliminary bouts. Each indy poet must also participate in two preliminary bouts.
- Preliminary bouts will consist of four rounds. Each team must send up one individual piece per round. There will be a fifth, optional group piece round in prelims.
- Poems may be repeated between the two bouts but not within the same bout.
- Each team will have one individual poem per round. Poets may not perform more than once in a bout. Bout order draw will be determined by a draw, assigning a placement of A, B, C, or D to each team.

The order of the rounds will be as follows:

- Round 1: ABCD
- Round 2: BCDA (one indy poet)
- Round 3: CDAB (one indy poet)
- Round 4: DABC (one indy poet)

- Round 5: ABCD (amongst who is participating in the optional group piece round. If there is not a group poem that the team has to put in this round, another individual poet who has not performed in this bout can perform as long as they are registered on the team)

Poet Advancement & Voting

**Refer to “Coaches Guide to R&R Rules” under “Advancement Eligibility” for more detailed information on the advancement process.*

- Registered festival participants will be able to nominate poets for awards throughout the festival and cast voted for their favorite poets in their bouts and additional bouts that they attend. The link for online voting will be provided to coaches before the bout. Poets will use the email they provided during registration to access the form. The awards form will be available for the duration of preliminary rounds and poets can update their form throughout. Bout forms are final upon submission.
- Participants will only be able to submit votes for their favorite poets for bouts in which they perform in and submit nominations for awards for bouts that they perform in or attend as audience members. For favorite poets votes, participant will rank their top five poems of the round. The vote must be for a poet outside of their own team. For awards nominations, poets can be from any team.
- Voting forms must be submitted no later than an hour after their bout.
- In order to be eligible for advancement, every poet must complete the bout voting form for the bout they participate in.
- Votes are ranked as such: five points for each top poem vote, four for each second favorite poem vote, three for each third favorite poem vote, two for each fourth favorite poem vote, and one for each fifth favorite poem vote.
- The votes will be tallied on a bout by bout basis. If poets compete in more than one bout their highest scoring bout will be considered.
- Initial rankings will be set by proportion of total votes each poet in the bout captured.
- Ties in ranking will be determined by point differential within the bout. If a tie remains, the Teaching Artist Corps will break the tie by vote.



The image shows a login page for the 2023 Awards Voting. At the top, there is a logo for "ROOTED & RADICAL" featuring stylized letters "R" and "R" with leaves. Below the logo, the text "2023 Awards Voting" is centered. A question asks, "Are you a Rooted & Radical participant (poet) or an audience member?". There are two radio button options: "Rooted & Radical Participant / Poet" (which is selected) and "Audience Member". A "Next →" button is located at the bottom right of the form.

Awards voting form login page



2023 Preliminary Rounds Voting

Login with the email you used to register for Rooted & Radical 2023 to continue:

****Note:** When you login you will be sent a security code via email to verify your identity. The sender address will be:

notifications@fillout.com.

Please check all email folders for the code, which should appear within moments in most cases.

If you are performing/voting in 2 bouts, when you return to this form to vote in your 2nd bout you will not need to have the code sent again unless you switch to a different browser or device.

Preliminary bout round voting form login page



2023 Awards Voting

Welcome back to your voting record! You should see your previous selections pre-filled in the fields below. You may add and/or change votes at any time until the form stops accepting responses.

The Bernie Mac Award

This award is presented in honor of Chicago legend and comedian, Bernie Mac. This award celebrates funny poems that use comedic relief to tell a story or make a point.

+ Select

Mild Sauce on the Side Award

Despite the ongoing segregation and history of redlining, Rooted & Radical attempts to bring people together through storytelling. This award honors poets whose poem celebrates and shares their side of home.

+ Select

Awards form partial view



2023 Prelims Voting

Dominique James, Bout # 1

Top Overall Poet *

Select your top favorite poet from Bout #1:

+ Select

Second Top Poet *

Select your second favorite poet from Bout #1:

+ Select

Third Top Poet *

Select your third favorite poet from Bout #1:

+ Select

Preliminary bout voting form partial view

All Star Prep Shop

- Within 48 hours of the last preliminary bout, the top 20 ranked poets from preliminaries will be invited to become an R&R All Star and perform in the R&R Semi Final Showcase. They will need to confirm their participation within 48 hours. The top 4 voted team poems will also be invited to perform in Semi Finals.
- In the past, All Star poets, both teams and individual poets, were invited to attend a mandatory All Star Prep Shop which is a 2 hour meeting to prepare for Semi Finals. In this meeting, poets will understand the rules, build camaraderie with one another, and learn how to prepare for their participation in Semi Finals. **This year, the All Star Prep Shop will not be in meeting form but will be a packet of information emailed to All Stars and Award Winners to review.**

Final Showcase

- A final showcase will replace Team Finals this year. The event will showcase R&R All Star poets and all Award winners which will be announced to poets privately and invite them to perform their award winning poems on the finals showcase stage. All poets and top poets from Semi Finals will also be invited to receive their awards for their All Star poet status at Finals Showcase as well.

INDIVIDUAL (“INDY POET”) REGISTRATION, BOUTS, & ADVANCEMENT

- All schools or organizations may register up to three Indy poets.

Bout Structure for Indy Poets

- Indy poets must participate in two Preliminary Bouts.
- Indy Poets will share one poem in each bout.
- The order of Indy Poets in the bout will be determined beforehand with the team order through a randomized process.
- Indy Poets may repeat poems throughout the festival.

POEMS & PERFORMANCES

Poet Introductions

All poets should introduce themselves in the following order:

- their name (REQUIRED) and poet number
- their school/community organization name. (REQUIRED)
- a *brief* call and response to encourage positive energy in the space prior to beginning their piece (OPTIONAL)
- the title of the poem. If the poem is untitled then the poet must say, “This piece is untitled.” (REQUIRED)
- Teams should introduce every poet performing in the group piece as well as their Team number.

Plagiarism & Authorship

- Participants must perform their own original writing. Participants who plagiarize will be disqualified.
- Clearly quoting/sampling other works and utilizing literary allusions is not considered plagiarism. Determining plagiarism infractions is the responsibility of the bout managers and/or grand master slam.

- Repeating poems from previous YCA festivals is not allowed.

Props, Costumes, & Music

- Props, costumes, and/or musical accompaniment may not be used in the slam. (i.e. performing a piece involving a hoodie while wearing a hoodie is allowed. Using a hoodie you're wearing as a prop to emphasize your words is not).
- Determining prop, costume and music infractions is the responsibility of the festival staff.

Safe Space Rules

- Rooted and Radical participants must abide by YCA's safe space rules: *No racist, sexist, homophobic, gender-biased, ableist, transphobic or otherwise derogatory speech that is degrading to any specific group of people.* Failure to heed this can result in point deduction as determined by festival staff.
- Discriminatory language is prohibited. Violations may result in disqualification. Determining content infractions is the responsibility of the festival staff. **Refer to The Coaches Guide to R&R Rules under "Profanity/Safe Space" for examples of content infractions.*
- Any disparaging of other teams by R&R poets in their poems is strictly prohibited.
- If a poet and/or team writes a poem disparaging another competing team or poet, their score will be zeroed out for the round.
- If you have any concerns about your piece safe space rules, please reach out to festival staff prior to your bout.

PROTESTING

● Protesting Rule Infractions

All coaches will be notified of rule infractions at the conclusion of the bout. Any protests of possible rule infractions must be logged with the bout manager prior to ending that bout. Festival staff will review the complaint with the rest of the tournament staff before making a decision regarding potential consequences. The decision will be presented to the affected individuals the next morning (or earlier if time-sensitive).

COACHES' GUIDE to Rooted and Radical RULES

As a coach/mentor, you are one of the most important movers in making this festival happen and making it happen in the best way for all of our young people. This short guide is meant to offer additional guidance and support as you prepare your students for R&R.

POET REGISTRATION

At R&R, we want as many students as possible to be able to join our community while at the same time offering the same advantages to all schools or organizations. Accordingly, we have expanded team registration to allow for up to 10 participants on an R&R team.

In addition to those 10, the coach of an R&R team may also sponsor three other Indy Poets at their school/organization.

This means up to 13 poets can be affiliated with any one school/organization.

If you have more than 13 poets interested in being involved in R&R, consider the following options:

- Encourage them to participate in auxiliary events. Visit <https://youngchicagoauthors.org/rnr> for more information.

If your school/organization signed up as a team, but has fewer than 4 poets able to compete, please inform the Director of Programs **no later than January 15th, 2025**, so that we can change your team registration to individual registrations. This is no problem because we want your young people to play an active role in R&R. Transferring incomplete team registrations to individual registrations whenever possible will also help us preserve competitive balance in the team competition.

AUTHORSHIP

Our community values young people and their power to represent themselves. To this end, we require that students present their own original work at our festival. In the tradition of hip hop, at R&R we encourage the use of literary allusion, sampling, found poems, and poems that reference other works while still maintaining their own original voice. When sampling or modeling new work after a pre-existing poem or song, it is best practice to shout out the original author in the title or dedication of the poem.

[Sorrow Is My Not My Name by Ross Gay, written after Gwendolyn Brooks](#)

[Palindrome by Nate Marshall, written after Lisel Mueller](#)

[Homage to My Hips by Dominique James, written after Lucille Clifton](#)

A final note on Authorship:

Remember: the spirit of R&R is collaborative. All poems can be helped by the poet(s) utilizing the collective wisdom of the team, mentor, and community. If you have any concerns about the eligibility of any of your pieces, please ask the Slam Sensei.

PROFANITY/SAFE SPACE

R&R is first and foremost a community space. In this spirit we limit the language at our slam, not because we believe in censorship, but rather so that we can provide access to the widest audience for our poets and our festival. To this end, the following words and all their variants are NOT allowed in the competition:

- (1) Fuck
- (2) Shit

The following words are allowed within reason:

- (1) Damn
- (2) Ass
- (3) Hell

In addition to the words above, there are a number of words that we feel can be used either to challenge structures of intolerance or, conversely, to attack members of particular groups and destroy safe space. The context determines which of these outcomes is achieved. Therefore, if these words/phrases appear in poems, particular attention will be paid to who is saying them and in what context:

- (1) Nigger/Nigga and other derogatory terms for racial or ethnic groups.
- (2) Bitch, Slut, Hoe, THOT, and other derogatory terms for women.
- (3) Faggot/Fag, Tranny, and other derogatory terms for queer people.

Again, we believe these words (and all words) are powerful and must be used responsibly. If you find students using this language on stage (or in general) in a damaging context, please use that opportunity to engage with them, dialogue, and encourage them to make the most thoughtful choices about their language and their art. In general, whenever students are attempting to use these words (or any words) we should, as mentors, challenge them to think about if it is the best and most essential way to communicate what they intend to communicate.

If you have any specific questions or concerns about these guidelines please contact asia@youngchicagoauthors.org.

R&R RECOMMENDATIONS

- R&R is rooted in the craft of poetry. Although we encourage poets to hone their performances skills, writing and language are valued over any performance elements.
- We encourage you to memorize your poems, though it is not required.
- Be respectful of yourself, the youth writing community, and the group you represent.
- Invite people to support you at your bout
- We advise teams to have as much fun as possible and be as prepared as they can be.
- We encourage coaches to talk to their poets about Rooted & Radical as a poetry festival, where community-building and sharing of poetry is more important than winning. While R&R is structured as a competition, please remember that the point is not the points, the point is the poetry!