

Rapping to the Bard



Kerry Sherck/Staff photos

Connecticut Playwright Fellow Marguerite Laurent, front, leads Azia McClinton, left, Shamajah Addison and Kanesha Pope yesterday in a dance acting out the words of a poem at the Hip-Hop Theater program sponsored by the Norwalk Housing Authority. Below, Laurent rehearses a poem with her students.

Choreographer brings the arts to Norwalk's hip-hop generation

By Asante Green
Staff Writer

NORWALK — Choreographer Marguerite Laurent wants youth to understand what recording artists such as TLC, India.Arie and the late Tupac Shakur have in common with writers such as Shakespeare Maya Angelou and Langston Hughes.

She uses hip-hop dance and music to bridge the gap in the eight-session summer program, Hip-Hop Theater, sponsored by the Norwalk Housing Authority.

"It wasn't hard to learn Shakespeare because Ms. Marguerite repeats the poems until we understand them," said Shantee Grace, 13, one of 15 students in yesterday's session. "Then we have to put the words of a poem to a dance, then perform it to music so we don't forget the poem."

With the understanding that children have different methods of learning, Laurent draws lessons from hip-hop movements such as the pop and lock, break dancing and the Harlem Shake. She said since some children learn by watching, she takes a verse from a poem and asks them to combine it with an interpretative dance that serves as a cue to remember the poem.

"The real purpose is to get children to understand that poetry can be fun and that the lyrics they hear on the radio in certain songs can also be poetry," Laurent said.

Students yesterday learned to recite Hughes' poem "Dream Deferred," then put their own movements to it.

"If you can get the children to learn poetry and recite poetry early they will carry it with them through high school and college."

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