

Shakespeare goes modern

◆ **NORWALK** — The playwright, plus several other poets, gets a music and dance revival.

By **JILL BODACH**
Hour Staff Writer

It's Shakespeare with an attitude.

Twenty-eight kids ages 6 to 12 in a Norwalk Housing Authority-sponsored class are combining portions of Shakespeare's "Macbeth," with the music of hip-hop group TLC's song "Creep." Typically old English and song lyrics blend about as well as oil and water, but when energetic dance moves, an enthusiastic teacher and open-minded kids are added to the mix, the result is a medley of rhyme, song and definite style.

The Hip Hop and Shakespeare class is taught by Stamford resident Marguerite Laurent, who is a performing artist by trade and regularly teaches the class for programs similar to the one run at Norwalk Housing Authority.

"As with most teenagers, the ones in this class feel no real connection to Shakespeare in their lives," Laurent said. "It is something they have to read and don't really understand. But when you add music to Shakespeare, it's amazing how much of a connection they feel. The music just adds a different element that they can relate to."

The students were leery at first about learning Shakespeare, Laurent said. Many were afraid that they would never be able to remember their lines and the dance moves all at once.

"At first I heard a lot of 'I can't do this,' but now that they really got it they are having a blast," Laurent said.

"They are practicing on their own and they are having a great time."

The class is divided into three sections. The first portion of the class is dedicated to focusing on learning the words to works like "Macbeth." The students are primarily focusing on the works of Shakespeare, although they are also learning some pieces by poets Langston Hughes and Maya Angelou.

The second part of the class is where Shakespeare and TLC meet. Laurent has choreographed a whole routine based on this union.

The third part is an exercise in writing, where the students talk about what poetry is and the importance of words, and choose words in

writing that will print a picture for the reader. The students also learn to write poetry. The combination of these three aspects of literature make a complete program that all the children can relate to.

"Some of the kids are really good when it comes to memorizing the words, some are wonderful dancers and the others can write beautiful poetry," said Laurent. "By putting it all together we are blending their talents and the final product combines the efforts of all the kids."

This is the first time the
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Hour photos/EPK THALTMANN
Above, Stamford resident Marguerite Laurent, center, demonstrates dance technique while teaching the poetry of Langston Hughes at a workshop for young people run by the Norwalk Housing Authority. Below, Laurent teaches the poetry to Kanesha Pope, 8, and Asia McClinton, 10, at right. The eight-week program teaches students about famous literary works through music and dance.



The Hour

■ WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 21, 2002

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program has been run in collaboration with the Housing Authority and Laurent hopes it is something she can be a part of again in the future. The housing authority is also pleased with the success of the program and is looking to incorporate it

into its programming again.

"I have been extremely pleased with both the program itself and with the instructor," said Curtis Law, the director of Norwalk Housing Authority. "It is one of our most popular programs and I would love to see it continue either later this year or next year."