

I wrote this poem for an in-school broadcast devoted to Black History Month. "BBL" stands for my school's name, the Bronx Charter School for Better Learning. An amazing actress on the staff read the poem. Off camera, two 5th Grade boys and I accompanied her on claves ("beat") and bongo drums ("loud drum roll" and "boom"). The **red** parts are where the spoken beats fall. YouTube has a video of the performance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=50BideSTEnQ>

Black History Month Poem

Black **h**istory!

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Black **h**istory!

There's no **m**ystery

To Black **h**istory!

But there's **m**isery

In Black **h**istory!

It **m**akes you **s**ad!

(beat, beat)

And it **m**akes you **m**ad!

(beat, beat)

Yet through **a**ll that was **b**ad,

Some **p**eople fought **b**ack!

They **w**on their **f**ights,

And **w**on our **r**ights,

And for **t**hat we **c**an be **g**lad!

[loud drum roll]

"The **a**rc of the **m**oral **u**niverse is **l**ong

But it **b**ends - **t**oward - **j**ustice."

(beat)

So said that **g**reat man, **M**artin Luther **K**ing,

With **w**ords - **s**o - **l**ustrous.

(beat)

What was **h**orrible **b**efore is **n**ow not **s**o,

But **f**ace it, **f**olks, we have **f**ar to **g**o.

Things are **b**etter than **t**hen; they can **g**et better **y**et.

But it **n**eeds our **s**marts, our **h**earts, our **s**weat.

[loud drum roll]

“The **arc** of the **moral** universe is **long**
But it **bends – toward – justice.**” (beat)
So said that **great** man, **Martin Luther King,**
And he **meant** it **not** for **just** us. (beat)

He **meant** it for the **mother** who’s **stuck** in **jail**
‘Cause she **can’t** **afford** the **courthouse** **bail.**

He **meant** it for the **child** who **dies** in infancy
‘Cause the **family** **lives** in **rural** poverty.
(Yes, **even** though we **live** in a **democracy,**
Doctors still don’t **help** folks **equally.**
Black babies **die** at **twice** the rate of **white.**
Who could **ever, ever, think** that’s **right?**)

[loud drum roll]

He **meant** it for **all** the **young** Black **men**
Who get **stopped** by **cops** **again** and **again.**
And **even** though it’s **frowned** upon on **CNN,**
“Stop and **frisk**” **mutates** like a **carcinogen.**

He **meant** it for **even** the **slightest** of **sleights**
Like when a **Black** person **can’t** hail a **cab** at **night.**

He **also** **meant** it for the **most** severe **wrongs**
Like when **Emmett Till** was **killed** for **whistling** a **song.**

[loud drum roll]

