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=50BideSTEEnQ

Black History Month Poem

Black history!
Black history!
Black history!

There’s no mystery
To Black history!
But there’s misery
In Black history!
It makes you sad!
And it makes you mad!
(beat, beat)
(beat, beat)

Yet through all that was bad,
Some people fought back!
They won their fights,
And won our rights,
And for that we can be glad!

[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,
With words - so - lustrous.
(beat)

What was horrible before is now not so,
But face it, folks, we have far to go.
Things are better than then; they can get better yet.
But it needs our smarts, our hearts, our sweat.

[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 **court**house **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]
“The **arc** of the **moral** universe is **long**
But it **bends** – **toward** – **justice.**” **(beat)**
**So** said that **great** man, **Martin Luther King**,  
And **since** he’s **correct**, we have **reason** to **sing**.  
Our **country** elected **President Obama**  
And **even** though it **caused** a **fair** bit of **drama**,  
It resulted in **one** most **definite** **thing**:  
Black **children** can **grow** up to be **anything**.

[loud drum roll]

The **future** looks **good**; things will **only** get **better**.  
But **each** of us **has** to be **(beat)** a go-getter!

[loud drum roll]

Let a **million** Black **umbrellas** open up in stormy **showers**  
Like a **million** Black **flowers**,  
Black **flowers**,  
Black **flowers**!

[loud drum roll]

And when it **rains** our **school** may have a **leaky roof**,  
But we **still** study **hard** in pursuit of the **truth**.  
We **must** **attain** **equality**  
That’s **foolproof**, **(boom, boom)**  
**fireproof**, **(boom, boom)**  
**shatterproof**, **(boom, boom)**  
**bulletproof**... **(boom, boom)**

[loud drum roll]

The **future** of the **world** lies on the **back** of its **youth**  
And it **starts** right here at **BBL**. **(beat)**  
Yes it **starts** at **BBL**. **(boom)**

– Bruce Ballard, February, 2015