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 5<sup>th</sup> 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.voutube.com/watch?v=50BideSTEn0

## **Black History Month Poem**

Black **his**tory!

| Black <mark>his</mark> tory                       |                            |
|---|----------------------------|
| Black <mark>his</mark> tory!                      |                            |
| Bla   | ack <mark>his</mark> tory! |
| There's no <mark>mys</mark> tery                  |                            |
| To Black <mark>his</mark> tory!                   |                            |
| But there's <b>mis</b> ery                        |                            |
| In Black <mark>his</mark> tory!                   |                            |
| It <mark>makes</mark> you <mark>sad</mark> !      | (beat, beat)               |
| And it <mark>makes</mark> you <mark>mad</mark> !  | (beat, beat)               |
| Yet through all that was bad                      | ,                          |
| Some <b>peo</b> ple fought <b>back</b> !          |                            |
| They <mark>won</mark> their <mark>fights</mark> , |                            |
| And <mark>won</mark> our <mark>rights</mark> ,    |                            |
| And for <b>that</b> we <b>can</b> be <b>glad</b>  | !                          |
| [loud drum roll]                                  |                            |
| "The arc of the moral univer                      | rse is <mark>long</mark>   |
| But it <b>bends - toward - jus</b> t              | tice." (beat               |
| So said that great man Mart                       | tin Luther King            |

Bu beat) So said that great man, N **lar**tin Luther King, With **words** - **so** - **lus**trous. (beat) What was **hor**rible before is **now** not **so**. But face it, folks, we have far to go. Things are **bet**ter 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 **moth**er who's **stuck** in **jail** 'Cause she **can't** af**ford** the **court**house **bail**.

He **meant** it for the **child** who **dies** in infancy 'Cause the **fam**ily **lives** in **rur**al poverty. (Yes, even though we **live** in a de**moc**racy, **Doc**tors 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 **e**ven though it's **frowned** upon on **CNN**, "Stop and **frisk**" mu**tates** like a car**cinogen**.

He **meant** it for **e**ven the **slight**est of **sleights** Like when a **Black** person **can't** hail a **cab** at **night**.

He **al**so **meant** it for the **most** severe **wrongs** Like when **Em**mett Till was **killed** for **whist**ling 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 **fu**ture looks **good**; things will **on**ly get **bet**ter. But **each** of us **has** to be **(beat)** a go-**get**ter!

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[loud drum roll]
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Let a **mill**ion Black um**brell**as open **up** in stormy **show**ers Like a **mill**ion Black **flow**ers,

> Black flowers, Black flowers!

[loud drum roll]

And when it **rains** our **school** may have a **leaky roof**, But we **still** study **hard** in pur**suit** of the **truth**.

## We must attain equality

| That's | <mark>fool</mark> proof,    | (boom, boom) |
|--------|-----------------------------|--------------|
|        | <mark>fire</mark> proof,    | (boom, boom) |
|        | <mark>shat</mark> terproof, | (boom, boom) |
|        | bulletproof                 | (boom, boom) |

## [loud drum roll]

| The <b>fu</b> ture of the <b>world</b> lies on the <b>back</b> of it | ts <b>youth</b> |
|--|-----------------|
| And it <mark>starts</mark> right here at <mark>B</mark> B <b>L</b> . | (beat)          |
| Yes it <b>starts</b> at <b>B</b> B <b>L</b> .                        | (boom)          |

- Bruce Ballard, February, 2015