Collaborative Spoken Word Poetry with AI

DESCRIPTION: This Lehigh AI Project provides a structure for a creative activity in order to experiment with and reflect upon the potential of AI for artistic collaboration. Over the course of a 75-minute in-class exercise, students (or other participants) engage in an iterative artistic process with text- and image-generating AI applications. Over a sequence of steps, students develop a creative work that incorporates poetic text, digital imagery, and embodied performance. The process combines individual effort and group decision-making, entangling both in artistic collaboration with AI. The exercise concludes with a presentation of the work to their peers and a reflective discussion about creation, authorship, and originality. The design of this exercise is modeled after general devising techniques in theatrical practice as well as the 'cut-up' method popularized by William S. Burroughs. This project presents a structured walkthrough of the creative activity, documenting the instructions, reasoning, and supplemental notes for each step in order for an instructor to guide the class in AI artmaking and reflection.

MATERIALS NEEDED: Devices with internet connections, text-based generative AI, image-based generative AI, shared document app, shared slideshow app, projector and screen

TIME NEEDED: 65-75 minutes

SEQUENCE:
1. **[Introduce](#)**
2. **[Generate](#)**
3. **[Remix](#)**
4. **[Voice](#)**
5. **Visualize**
6. **Rehearse**
7. **Present**
8. **Reflect**

BACKGROUND:

PREPARATION:

KEYWORDS: theatre, spoken word, poetry, performance, art, artmaking, devising, creativity, originality, authorship, collaboration, cut-up method

STEP **1**	***Introduce*** *(5 minutes)*
	Introduce the exercise to the students.
INSTRUCTIONS:	*Suggested introduction to read or modify:* This is an exercise of creative generation in collaboration with AI. The foundation of the exercise is rooted in theatrical devising, a process of iterative development to create an embodied work. Over several steps, you will work both independently and in groups to collaborate with each other and generative AI to create a spoken word performance. Afterwards, there will be reflection and discussion on the artmaking process, authorship, and AI's potential to create art.
REASONING:	An introduction provides the framework for students to understand how the devising process will culminate (a spoken word performance) and anchors topics of discussion (artmaking, authorship, AI+creativity) that will follow the exercise.
NOTES:	● **Theatrical devising** is a collaborative, iterative process to develop a new work. Devising often begins with a theme, source text, found objects, or simple prompts. The work is then generated through successive exercises that respond to the increasing body of content. Devising practices are generally more ensemble-driven and often incorporate improvisation or extemporaneous response.

STEP 2	*Generate* (10 minutes)
	Students individually prompt a text-generating AI to write a poem.

INSTRUCTIONS:	This step is completed individually. - Consider the provided prompts: "A dream you have for the future of AI" "A fear you have about the advancement of AI" "What you believe it means to be human" - Using a text-generating AI, share your response to one of the provided prompts. - Ask the AI to generate a few poems based on *your* response. - Working off of one or more of those options, prompt the AI to revise and reimagine part or all of the poem. Repeat. - Use the full allotted time to guide the AI in successive revision to create a single 10–20 line poem.
REASONING:	This step creates a source text for later remixing. By completing this step individually, it ensures the final work will have generated content from all students, and that the content will be shaped by their personal responses to the prompts. By positioning the AI as the writer, it creates a controlled environment for discussion where every word of the final work comes from AI in some manner. The use of AI also accelerates the process of originating work to quickly move past any "fear of the blank page."
NOTES:	- The prompts above work well with the exercise, since the focus is on human/AI interaction. However, these can be replaced or modified as desired. If so, the prompts should be closely related on a single topic, as that will support better cohesion in Step 3: Remix. - This exercise has been conducted with ChatGPT versions 3.5 and 4, but any similarly powerful text-generating AI should suffice. - As students are guiding the AI in revision, encourage prompting the AI to experiment with format in order to challenge assumptions of what the poem might look like. It may help to suggest various formats (metered or unmetered, rhymed or unrhymed) or poets to emulate, depending on their pre-existing knowledge. - The final poem selected should be entirely written by AI. While it may use language they shared in their response to the prompt, students should not add any specific text to what the AI generated.

STEP 3	***Remix*** *(10 minutes)*
	In small groups, students combine and 'remix' their individual poems.

INSTRUCTIONS:	At this point, steps are completed in a small group of 3–4.
	 ● Combine your individual poems into a single shared document.
	 ● Collaboratively 'remix' the poems by splicing them together into a single text.
	 ● This text must fulfill several requirements:
	    ○ It must include excerpts from each student's poem.
	    ○ But do not include the poems in entirety—leave some lines behind.
	    ○ The poems should be interwoven, not simply arranged one after the other.
	    ○ At least one line must repeat.
	 ● Groups should plan on using about ½ to ⅔ of the original poems.

REASONING:	This step generates new work from existing content. This ensures that the final text was undeniably and consciously shaped by human hands. It also introduces the idea that originality can potentially be achieved even if you are only rearranging existing, pre-written content.

NOTES:	● This is essentially the "cut-up technique" popularized by William S. Burroughs.
	    ○ The suggested reading of Austin Kleon's "The (surprisingly long) history of the cut-up technique" is a brief but effective introduction to the method.
	 ● Provide the requirements in writing (whether via slide, handout, etc.)
	 ● If groups are having trouble getting started, recommend that they highlight a couple favorite lines from *other* students' poems, and start with those.
	 ● While deciding how to splice different pieces together, encourage students to identify associations.
	    ○ Where do two lines echo one another?
	    ○ Where do two lines flow in logical (though unintended) progression from one another?
	    ○ Where do two lines stand in compelling opposition?
	    ○ What lines are effective at concluding a train of thought or beginning a new one?
	 ● A few clarifications on the requirements:
	    ○ The repeated line(s) can be immediate or later.
	    ○ Students are welcome to use fragments rather than entire lines, though trying to build an entirely different line word-by-word from excerpts should be discouraged.
	 ● If time allows, an additional 5 minutes can be allotted to feed the remixed text *back* into the generative AI, asking it to summarize the idea of the poem with a single word. The groups then take that single word and sprinkle it as a standalone line at least three times throughout the text.

STEP **4**	***Voice*** *(10 minutes)*
	Within groups, assign lines, and rehearse the text aloud.

INSTRUCTIONS:	This step begins the transition into spoken word performance.
	● Assign the lines of the text among group members. Again, a couple of requirements apply:
	   ○ All members of the group must speak part of the text.
	   ○ At least one line must be said in unison.
	● Once lines are assigned, rehearse the text out loud.
	● After rehearsing, reflect and make any desired changes—adding a line back in from a poem, removing a line, moving a line, etc. Also, consider if any line assignments should be shifted to maximize flow, clarity, thematic resonance, or impact.
	● Repeat the rehearse/reflect/revise process as time allows.

REASONING:	This step ensures each student has a part in both the text and delivery of the final piece. The rehearsal time will foster stronger, more prepared performances than if they simply read their remixed poems aloud. The more they are able to rehearse, the more familiar they will be with the lines and the flow, and the more they can look up from their phones towards the audience.
NOTES:	● Reassure students that they do not have to memorize the piece—they can read from electronic devices. ● Rehearsing out loud is essential for being comfortable with how the words come out of the mouth and for hearing how the lines work together. Reading softly in small huddles is not adequate preparation. ● If space allows, students should rehearse it as they plan to present it. I.e, if they will be standing at the front of the room for the performance, they should stand during the rehearsal of the piece. ● If time and space allows, an additional 5 minutes can be allotted to encourage students to develop dynamic physical staging. How can it be presented in positions other than a single line? How can that positioning change over the course of the performance? How might movement be used to support or highlight portions of the text?

STEP 5	**Visualize** *(5 minutes)*
	DRAFT IN PROGRESS
INSTRUCTIONS:	
REASONING:	
NOTES:	

STEP **6**	**Rehearse** *(5 minutes)*
	DRAFT IN PROGRESS
INSTRUCTIONS:	
REASONING:	
NOTES:	

STEP **7**	**_Present_** _(10 minutes)_ *
	DRAFT IN PROGRESS
INSTRUCTIONS:	
REASONING:	
NOTES:	

STEP	Reflect *(10 minutes)*
8	**DRAFT IN PROGRESS**
INSTRUCTIONS:	
REASONING:	
NOTES:	

CONCLUSION: