

Speaking up for human rights

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A quick flashback. During the second week of October last year I wrote, "In the future, children will be taught slam poetry instead of show and tell, students will have freestyle societies instead of debating clubs, and your thesis defence will be done to a beat."

Parents from across the planet e-mailed me their aversion. "Letting those horrible rappers and gangsters, with their crotch grabbing and foul language talk to my pure precious children? No way!" Haters. I love them. They are often hysterical, and usually incorrect.



Take for example **The 411 Initiative for Change**, a Toronto-based not-for-profit organization facilitating The Barbershop Show, a music and performance tour that is planning to reach 30,000 students in rural and urban Canada. The message delivered by musicians and performance artists is human rights education. They want to empower youth to become active members of a global community.

Anita Wong, 411's program and development director, said the tour is a model for social development. They use artists and music to demonstrate and explain issues in social change. "The youth are engaged by it, and it helps to build social cohesion," she said. In addition to the actual tour, 411 created www.whatsthe411.ca, which offers models and resources for teachers, and a network of resources for youth and students who need assistance with their own projects.

The tour is coming to the National Capital Region November 7 to 11. Students in Ottawa, Stittsville, Dunrobin and Gatineau will see performances by Shohn "Rikoshay" Boothe, a Toronto writer, producer and MC; Melanie Durrant, an edgy R&B singer and songwriter; and Dwayne Morgan, a writer, poet, and spoken-word artist. Known for his poetry about love, sex and relationships, Morgan will instead be focusing on violence against women and girls, and the plight of women survivors of armed conflict. "Each person has the power to shape history," Morgan said. "The youth need to be taught to get up and get active."



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