

What's in a name?

Shandiez has been my name since infancy. It's a combination of three different names; Sandra, Shenita and Tandiez. My mother was a clever one. She gave me the name trying to be unique, but the wave I'd caught gave me the label "different". My name begged definitions too various to mention, so I just sat back and listened as people gave their opinion. My intuition told me it means beauty. Some say it reads ghetto, a little too stereotypical for me. Over and over I explained my name, leaving their heads to swing and jaws to drop. I helped them pronounce it, break it down, until the name became a spin on wordplay. I realized my name was a spin on God's play with words; therefore, my lyricism needed to match my name. The posture of my weight must gravitate with the motion of the three syllables used to pronounce my name, so poetry became my sanity to tame the masses who always asked the meaning of my name ~

At the peak of finding my identity, YouTube was my girl. She showed me rap battles with women who looked like me and had names like me, names that left curves on peoples' stature, leaving me to think, one day, that could be me -- in the ring battling the toughest. Until one day I realized I didn't have to be loud and proud 24/7 to get applauded or degrade the next person to get a couple *oo's* and *ah's*. Poet Jasmine Mans graced my screen with words that packed punches, hit like bullets, but they weren't aimed at anyone, just stories intertwined with metaphors and truth. The stage was her showcase and she was the art being shown. Her words reeled me into a world of notebooks and pens in dark rooms filled with sin.

When my school started a poetry club, Illi-Noize, I joined with no hesitation. This was my moment to show my hidden treasure, my ability to speak the poetry of life. Joining this group gave me chance to break free from the locks I put on my mouth when others were around. Until

they told me, I never knew my work inspired others. I just thought mixing similes and metaphors was *fun*, innocent. I came off as distant to most people, but when I spoke, I was a raging bull ready to break free. The small group of poets noticed. They didn't have to tell me I had talent; I knew because they welcomed me. They became my family, the family that celebrated my last performance, a poem we had written together.



YO MA

~

Walking down State,

And I hear

Hey, Beautiful.

Aye, Shorty, Can I get yo numba?

What?

I know he didn't just call me out.

Some nerve you have to scream and shout.

Yep, that's you.

My neck made a snap,

Turning my demeanor into something deadly,

Or should I say *me*, 'cause it seems we have the same destiny.

My mouth twisted into knots

Before the butterflies in my stomach could flutter into salvation.

That's not who I am.

I'm not

Hey, Gorgeous.

I'm not yo ma.

I know that's not how you talk to "YO MA."

My mind taking a pause,

Knowing this man just didn't scream

BIG SEXY.

My Name isn't x3.

Aye, Girl,

Can I talk to you—for a second?

~

When we performed, we were in unison. No one was off-key or offbeat. We were one, connected at the hip; we supported each other. All girls, a sisterhood, we were more than poetry. Leaving the group helped me grow, but I feared I wouldn't find another matching or exceeding the same expectations. I mourned Illi-Noize all summer before starting classes at Northern Illinois University. My first time strolling around campus, I felt lonely, far from the urban scenery I'm used to.

As I looked for a way to connect to my new environment, I found hope at the Involvement Fair.

"Hey, do you do poetry?" I turned around and screamed "Yes!" as loud as I could to make sure they could hear me. In the midst of trying to find a poetry club, they found me.

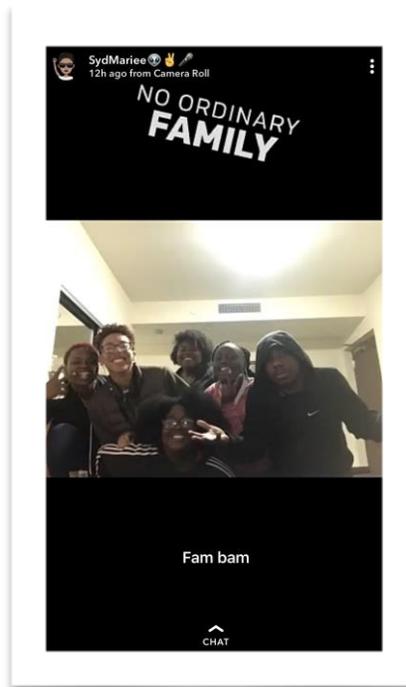
When I received the text message saying they were having open practices, my heart became heavy. I started to doubt myself, asking, "Do I really have the potential?" I arrived at the

door, waiting patiently to see a familiar face. I met two other ladies who also wanted to join and felt relief when I found we were all freshmen and going for the same thing.

The process the other prospects and I had to endure lasted for three weeks and included two performances, the second of which featured solo and ensemble exhibitions. During the group piece, we spoke and connected as if we'd known each other for years. There wasn't any disconnect. This is what I wanted.

became members of the campus *4 Poets 1 Mic*.

After joining 4 Poets meetings preparing for getting to know one another. sitting around the table poetry. We give each other creativity through group days, the group still comes peaks and valleys of the day one another.



To all our surprise, we dopest poetry group on

1 Mic, we've had several upcoming events and just We've spent many practices hearing each other speak feedback and embrace our pieces. Even on our worst together, and we discuss our so everyone can understand

Illi-Noize was my old home, 4 Poets One Mic is my new home. Illi-Noize helped me find my voice, 4 Poets One Mic helped me be comfortable with my voice. Whether it be ghetto, loud or beautiful, I'll always be *Shandiez*.