

# Furious Flower Poetry Center



# *unleashed*

The Campaign for **JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY**.



Founded in 1994 by Joanne V. Gabbin (first row, far right), chartered in 2005 at JMU, and now housed in the College of Arts and Letters, Furious Flower is the United States' premier academic center devoted to Black poetry.



"Furious Flower brings us **giants of American poetry**. It enlivens and inspires creativity, and it expands our ideas of what poetry can do and mean in our society. This center's past, present and future constitute one of JMU's most valuable assets."

**Jonathan R. Alger**

*President, James Madison University*

"... more than an academic institute, more even than a movement, **Furious Flower is a whirlwind of possibility.**"

**Rita Dove**

*Former U.S. Poet Laureate, from her foreword to Furious Flower: Seeding the Future of African American Poetry*







## Center of **NATIONAL ATTENTION**

**FOR MORE THAN A QUARTER-CENTURY,** Furious Flower has presented hundreds of extraordinary opportunities to see and hear living poets perform—and countless ways to study with some of the most impressive writers of our time. It happens right here on our Harrisonburg campus, making JMU a distinctive landmark on the nation’s literary landscape.

“I have an intense appreciation of the ways in which Furious Flower has created a wonderful support network for African American poets and **really amplified the role of poetry overall in American culture.**”

**Deirdre Cross**

*Director of Public Programs, National Museum of African American History and Culture*



*On the cover:* The first U.S. Youth Poet Laureate and the 2021 Presidential Inauguration poet, Amanda Gorman, performs in 2019 at Furious Flower’s 25th anniversary celebration in Washington, D.C.

*Above left:* Illiana Harris (’22), standing, and Claire Hietanen (’20) interview poet/performer/librettist Douglas Kearney for their class, “Black Studies and Black Spaces.”

*Above right:* Artist and activist Jessica Care Moore performing at The Golden Pony in downtown Harrisonburg as part of the Furious Flower reading series.



## Poetry **WITHOUT BOUNDARIES**

**DELIVERING DYNAMIC PROGRAMS** for every age group, the Furious Flower Poetry Center provides a crucial countespace for writers and poetry lovers—one that spotlights Black literatures, cultures and arts—as well as an important resource for educators and students at all levels. From grade school to graduate school and beyond, Furious Flower is committed to **ensuring the visibility, inclusion and critical consideration of Black poets in American letters**, as well as in the whole range of educational curricula.

- K-12 and College Students
- Primary and Secondary School Teachers
- College and University Professors
- Creative Writers
- Literary Scholars
- Poetry Lovers Everywhere

“From its beginnings, Furious Flower has been a **place of affirmation and self-determination.**”

**Joanne V. Gabbin**  
Furious Flower Poetry Center  
Founder and Executive Director



*Top left:* Interdisciplinary poet and educator Avery J. Young performs in honor of Furious Flower in 2019.

*Top middle:* Hannah Robinson ('18) with New Orleans poet Brenda Marie Osbey in 2018

*Top right:* An undergraduate student from Lincoln University shares her work during the 2016 Collegiate Summit.

*Right:* Local children in grades 3–8 attend Creativity Camp workshops for expression, arts appreciation and fun.





## WHY POETRY?

### STUDYING POETRY BENEFITS STUDENTS

in many ways. Not only does it develop critical thinking, but it has also been shown to improve college students' interpersonal communication. Both are important workforce skills. In fact, poetry-based learning helps develop a number of **career-critical strengths**, such as cultural competence, feeling and expressing empathy, self-reflection and moral reasoning. As an interdisciplinary tool, it has been effective in fostering collaboration and creativity in academic settings as diverse as makerspaces and dance classes.

**Poetry's power is multifaceted.** Perhaps its greatest contribution is serving as mirror, window and door: reflecting and representing shared humanity, as well as providing a view into someone else's experiences and an opening into self-expression.



**"The view from the window can be imagined or real, familiar or new, panoramic or narrow. Usually the window is also a door, and a reader has only to walk through in imagination ...".**

**Rudine Sims Bishop**

*"Mother of multicultural literature"  
and Professor Emerita, Ohio State  
University*



"The poem provides a space where we learn to experience the heat of anger as both the dragon and the flame."

**Lauren K. Alleyne**

Assistant Director of Furious Flower

## Art **IN WORDS**

Like other artistic forms of expression, poetry often gives us a chance to consider and talk about difficult topics, including controversial or painful issues. The poem can be analyzed and contextualized without attack. We have the opportunity to understand and affirm different viewpoints even when we disagree.

Paradoxically, the poem itself can confront us in the most meaningful way. It can challenge our perceptions and expand our minds. It can push the boundaries of comfort and increase our capacity for compassion. Art is a powerful instrument of social change.



## FUNDING NOW AND IN THE FUTURE

The following signature programs and publications can continue at JMU only with considerable funding from grants and private gifts:

- **Furious Flower Poetry Conference:** an epic affair for poets, literary critics and other scholars of Black poetry. The center's historic flagship, this conference reconvenes every 10 years.
- **Annual poetry reading series and poetry prize:** broad exposure for poets and access for their audiences, whether in person or online, featuring and attended by people from all over the world.
- ***The Fight & The Fiddle:*** quarterly online literary journal ideal for use in classrooms and coursework.
- **Creativity Camp and Slam Academy:** weeklong summer programs introduce primary and secondary students to poetry, as well as related visual and performing arts.
- **Legacy Seminars:** a rare opportunity for educators to learn directly from a living legend and to study with top literary scholars.
- **Collegiate Summits:** small-group workshops led by established authors for undergraduate creative writers to refine their craft.
- **Special events like tribute concerts and other artistic performances:** theatrical celebrations of such cultural icons as Toni Morrison and Maya Angelou.
- **Valuable, unique archives:** Furious Flower's continuing chronicle of the development of Black poetry, managed and preserved in partnership with the JMU Libraries' Special Collections.

*Top left:* Poets (left to right) Eugene Redmond, Thomas Sayers Ellis, Sharan Strange, Yusef Komunyakaa, Treasure Shields Redmond, Major Jackson, Joanne Gabbin, Opal Moore and Tony Medina at the 2004 Furious Flower Poetry Conference

*Top right:* A member of New Song, an a capella group, performs in "Throw Your Head Back and Sing: A Tribute to Maya Angelou" in 2016.



"The world of Black poetry has poured so much into Furious Flower. The digital archive is a way for us to give back to the world, making it accessible and interesting and inspiring for generations to come."

Spencer Law ('20)



## It's time to **BREAK THROUGH**

*Unleashed: The Campaign for James Madison University* will provide new funding for signature programs and reinforce our ability to engage great students and professors. It's how we're going big and making this phenomenal university a national name. It's time to come together in the Madison spirit of possibility, raising James Madison University to the place of prominence it deserves. Success will take all of us, so please invest now to unleash JMU's promise.

**FOR SOCIETY: Renewing Our Civil Society** .....\$15M

**FOR STUDENTS: Opening Our Doors**.....\$80M

**FOR LEARNING: Advancing Our Understanding**.....\$65M

**FOR CAMPUS: Building Our Success** .....\$32M

**FOR OPPORTUNITY: Realizing Our Vision**.....\$8M



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## SPIRIT OF WELCOME

One of the hallmarks of Furious Flower is its warm welcome. Program attendees consistently remark on their sense of community during and after the center's events. Here is an institution without an institutional feel; this is an elite academic space that is nonetheless a model of inclusion. The poets themselves represent an incredible array of talent who embrace a wealth of different styles and subjects, and Furious Flower's fans and friends—students, donors, collaborators and partners—are equally diverse.

*Opposite page top left:* Spencer Law ('20), English professor Mollie Godfrey, Norman Jones III ('21), Education professor Marybeth Cancienne, WRTC professor Seán McCarthy and Lillie Jacob ('21) present a panel on FuriousFlower.org, a project developed in the spring 2019 course, "Innovating the Archives."

*Top left:* Nikki Giovanni opens her arms in 2019 to educators studying her work so they can teach more inclusive curricula.

*Top right:* Poet Anastacia Reneé greets students attending a Furious Flower workshop in 2018.



**"Furious Flower is the real reunion of Black poets."**

**Tyehimba Jess**

*Winner of the 2016 Pulitzer Prize and numerous other awards and fellowships*

"I was invited to attend the first Furious Flower conference . . . and I had to convince the dean to give me funding to travel there. The conference was **worth every penny** she gave me, and every word I've written since."

**Natasha Trethewey**

*19th U.S. Poet Laureate, winner of the 2007 Pulitzer Prize and the 2016 Academy of American Poets Fellowship among many other awards, and Professor of English at Northwestern University*

"If nothing ever happens again in a crowd for me, it doesn't matter. **This is as good as it gets.**"

**Toni Morrison** *(winner of Nobel and Pulitzer prizes, among other awards, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom) upon being honored at Furious Flower's "Sheer Good Fortune," presented in partnership with Nikki Giovanni and Virginia Tech*



**"This is Black poetry planet."**

**Nikky Finney**

*Winner of the 2011 National Book Award, faculty member of Cave Canem, founding member of Affrilachian Poets, and John H. Bennett, Jr., Chair in Creative Writing and Southern Letters at the University of South Carolina*

"What it means to belong to this community is to come ... in our absolutely most unique forms, in our most unique voices, in our most unique shapes, in our most unique desires, and our most unique things that we make. And to say that: **Together ... we make this big, unruly, beautiful, world-governing thing called Black poetry.** That's what it means to be a part of this community. ... That's what you've done in calling us together again, and again, and again."

**Elizabeth Alexander**

*Award-winning poet and literary critic and President of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, on the occasion of Furious Flower's 25th Anniversary Celebration*





## First and **FOREMOST**

**CHARTERED AT JMU AS AN ACADEMIC CENTER IN 2005**, Furious Flower serves three enduring purposes: **celebration, education and preservation**. To fulfill those aims, the stellar programming, scholarship and special collections that audiences expect from this organization rely on grants from funders like Virginia Humanities, the Poetry Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts.

*Now, private donor support is critical to the center's continued growth. You can ensure Furious Flower's success in remaining not only the **first** but the **foremost** U.S. academic center devoted to Black poetry.*

### SEEDING THE FUTURE

National Book Award winner Nikky Finney recently expressed her gratitude for the center's work so far and especially for all that Joanne Gabbin has done in preparing for the future of Black poetry: "Thank you for thinking of poetry and thinking of us. We are indebted to you—forever and we could never pay you back—but we will try." She, like most of the poets pictured in this prospectus, supports Furious Flower financially.

**Artists need patrons like you.** They require passionate advocates and financial backing.

- **Propel poets and poetry.** When you provide Furious Flower with funding for visiting writers, the annual poetry prize, its reading series, or the decade-defining conferences, you help recognize and reward emerging and established poets.
- **Support students and educators.** Backing events and other programming so they can be affordable for all, or making more scholarships and fellowships available to ensure greater access, means more chances for more people to engage with Black poets at JMU.
- **Energize scholars.** Expanding the study of Black poetry requires more scholars conducting archival research and digital humanities projects. Encourage this kind of work by underwriting scholars in residence, guest lecturers, and collections to be identified and acquired (e.g., papers, related artworks) for Furious Flower

*Above: Furious Flower's leaders Joanne V. Gabbin, founder and executive director (left), and Lauren K. Alleyne, assistant director (right).*

# It's time to renew our civil society

## Furious Flower Poetry Center **UNLEASHED**

Poetry matters. *Black poetry matters.* This art form, championed by Furious Flower for more than 25 years, is especially essential to the university now. Your investment today in this beacon of Black brilliance—one of the **cornerstones of diversity and inclusion** here—helps to ensure that JMU's Furious Flower Poetry Center continues to rise in national and even international prominence. Celebrate the arts and artists. Bring literature to life for audiences everywhere. Preserve a rich legacy. And make JMU an enduring destination for the best of Black poetry.



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