

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS  
and  
POETRY FOUNDATION  
present



For immediate release  
May 3, 2007

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**NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS AND POETRY FOUNDATION  
ANNOUNCE 2007 NATIONAL CHAMPION OF  
*POETRY OUT LOUD: NATIONAL RECITATION CONTEST***

***Washington, DC, student Amanda Fernandez wins \$20,000 first prize in national poetry competition***

*Washington, DC* — With a powerful command of the stage, Duke Ellington School of the Arts senior Amanda Fernandez riveted audiences with “Ma Rainey,” a vibrant portrait of rural African-American life by poet Sterling A. Brown. The poem was one of three recitations that earned Fernandez the title of 2007 *Poetry Out Loud* National Champion and a \$20,000 scholarship prize. The *Poetry Out Loud* National Finals were held Tuesday night at the George Washington University Lisner Auditorium in Washington, DC. Fernandez was among 12 finalists and 51 state champions from around the country who participated in the second annual national poetry recitation contest, sponsored by the National Arts Endowment and the Poetry Foundation.

“This has been the most nerve wracking, intense, exciting, and rewarding experience of my life,” said Fernandez. She credits her English teacher, Charles Feeser, who organized a *Poetry Out Loud* contest for her class and encouraged her with his passion for poetry. Fernandez advanced to National Champion from a field of competition that included more than 1,000 high schools and more than 100,000 high school students across the country.

Fernandez received a \$20,000 scholarship prize as *Poetry Out Loud* national champion. The second-place winner was Branden Emanuel Wellington of Broad Ripple High School in Indianapolis, Indiana, who received a \$10,000 scholarship prize. The Virginia State Champion, Alanna Rivera, of Washington-Lee High School in Arlington, Virginia, received the third place prize and a \$5,000 scholarship. In addition, each of the top 12 finalists received a \$1,000 scholarship prize; Southwest Airlines provided each finalist with two roundtrip airline tickets. The finalists’ schools received \$500 each for the purchase of poetry books.

The other 12 national finalists include Naja Selby of New Jersey, Elizabeth Ann McCormick of West Virginia, Robi Mahan of Illinois, Dean Muir of Kentucky, Shuqiao Song of Nebraska, Joshua Kelly of Montana, Fantasia Lonjose of New Mexico, Janessa Nickell of South Dakota, and Amanda E. Fujiki of Utah.

Special guest judges presided over the competition, including Garrison Keillor, host of the radio show “A Prairie Home Companion;” poets Marilyn Chin and Kwame Dawes; Dominique Raccach, founder and CEO of Sourcebooks, Inc.; Steve Karesh of XM Satellite Radio; and last year’s National Champion Jackson Hille. Scott Simon, host of National Public Radio’s “Weekend Edition Saturday,” served as master of ceremonies.

On April 30, 51 high school students – *Poetry Out Loud* champions from every state and the District of Columbia – competed in three semifinal rounds based on geographic region. Twelve students advanced to compete in the National Finals on May 1. Judges evaluated student performances on criteria including physical presence, articulation, evidence of understanding, level of difficulty, and accuracy. Students performed poems from the *Poetry Out Loud* print and online anthologies ([www.poetryoutloud.org](http://www.poetryoutloud.org)). The event was the culmination of a pyramid-structure competition that began in January among schools in every state and the District of Columbia.

The National Finals are the culmination of efforts by many partners. The NEA and the Poetry Foundation have contributed support for administration of the program, educational materials, and prizes for both the state and National Finals. Each State Arts Agency implemented the program in high schools in each state, often in collaboration with local arts organizations. The *Poetry Out Loud* National Finals was administered by the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation. Additional support for the 2007 National Finals has been provided by Southwest Airlines.

*Poetry Out Loud* seeks to foster the next generation of literary readers by building on the resurgence of poetry as an oral art form, as seen in the slam poetry movement and the popularity of rap music among youth. Through *Poetry Out Loud*, students can master public speaking skills, build self-confidence, and learn about their literary heritage. Now in its second year of national competition, *Poetry Out Loud* has inspired thousands of high school students to discover classic and contemporary poetry. To find out how to get involved in the 2008 *Poetry Out Loud National Recitation Contest*, visit [www.poetryoutloud.org](http://www.poetryoutloud.org).

### **About the National Endowment for the Arts**

The National Endowment for the Arts is a public agency dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts, both new and established; bringing the arts to all Americans; and providing leadership in arts education. Established by Congress in 1965 as an independent agency of the federal government, the Arts Endowment is the largest national funder of the arts, bringing great art to all 50 states, including rural areas, inner cities, and military bases.

### **About the Poetry Foundation**

The Poetry Foundation, publisher of *Poetry* magazine and one of the largest literary organizations in the world, exists to discover and celebrate the best poetry and to place it before the largest possible audience. The Poetry Foundation seeks to be a leader in shaping a receptive climate for poetry by developing new audiences, creating new avenues for delivery, and encouraging new kinds of poetry through innovative literary prizes and programs. For more information, please visit [www.poetryfoundation.org](http://www.poetryfoundation.org).

### **About Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation**

Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation supports the richness and diversity of the region’s arts resources and promotes wider access to the art and artists of the region, nation and world. To learn more about MAAF, its programs and services, visit [www.midatlanticarts.org](http://www.midatlanticarts.org).