

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS
and
POETRY FOUNDATION
present



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

***51 state champions to match poetry skills for national honors and scholarship prizes in
Washington, DC***

Washington, DC — The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the Poetry Foundation announce the National Finals of *Poetry Out Loud: National Recitation Contest*, a program that encourages high school students to learn about great poetry through memorization, performance, and competition. On April 30 and May 1, high school students who advanced from 51 poetry recitation championships in every state and the District of Columbia will gather at George Washington University Lisner Auditorium in Washington, DC, to match their skills in poetry memorization and recitation. Special guest judges—including Garrison Keillor, host of the radio show “A Prairie Home Companion,” poets Marilyn Chin and Kwame Dawes, and last year’s national champion Jackson Hille—will assess the students’ presentations. Scott Simon of National Public Radio returns to serve as master of ceremonies.

“By memorizing a poem, a student gets a profound and intimate understanding of literature,” said NEA Chairman Dana Gioia. “The experience of reciting a poem before their peers and the public also develops practical skills that students will use every day in the workplace and in the community.”

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. An estimated 1,000 schools and 100,000 students have participated in the 2007 national competition.

“To learn a great poem by heart is to make a friend for life,” said John Barr, president of the Poetry Foundation. “The national recitation program brings fresh energy to an ancient art form by returning it to the classrooms of America.”

The National Finals will take place on April 30 and May 1. On April 30, students grouped in three geographic regions will compete in three semifinal rounds. Twelve students (four from each region) will advance to compete in the National Finals on May 1. Judges will evaluate each student performance on criteria including physical presence, articulation, evidence of understanding, level of difficulty, and accuracy. Students are prepared to perform three poems from the *Poetry Out Loud* print and online anthologies (www.poetryoutloud.org). Some of the poems that have helped bring state winners to the National Finals range from “Walking Down Park” by Nikki Giovanni to “A Psalm of Life” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

Poetry Out Loud Partnerships

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 will be administered by the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation. Additional support for the 2007 National Finals has been provided by Southwest Airlines.

Poetry Out Loud Educational Materials

The NEA and the Poetry Foundation provided free, standards-based curriculum materials for use by participating schools. These materials include print and online poetry anthologies containing nearly 500 classic and contemporary poems, a teacher’s guide, and a CD featuring insight and recitations by well-known actors and writers such as Anthony Hopkins, James Earl Jones, Alyssa Milano, and N. Scott Momaday.

Contests and Prizes

Between September 2006 and March 2007, schools in every state and the District of Columbia took part in the pyramid-structured competition. At the classroom level, teachers introduced students to the poems and educational resources, later leading students in classroom and then schoolwide competitions. Several states including New Jersey, North Carolina, and Wyoming, expanded their contests beyond the state capital region to reach students across the state. The *Poetry Out Loud* National Finals will award a total of \$50,000 in scholarship prizes and school stipends, including \$20,000 for the *Poetry Out Loud* National Champion, and \$10,000 and \$5,000 for the second- and third-place finalists. Each of the top 12 finalists also will receive two roundtrip airline tickets courtesy of Southwest Airlines. Each state-level final has awarded \$1,000 in cash prizes to the champion, runner up, and their schools. In total, *Poetry Out Loud* will award more than \$100,000 to state- and national-level winners. Schools that are not part of the official *Poetry Out Loud* competition are welcome to conduct their own contests using the online resources at www.poetryoutloud.org.

National Finals at the Lisner Auditorium

The 51 state champions will gather at the *Poetry Out Loud* Semifinals on Monday, April 30, from 9:00 am to 7:00 pm at the Lisner Auditorium, George Washington University, 730 21st Street, NW, Washington, DC. Twelve finalists will advance to the National Finals, also held at the Lisner on Tuesday, May 1, from 7:00 to 10:00 pm. Both events are free and open to the public. To reserve a seat for the May 1 National Finals, call 202-682-5772 or send an email to poetryoutloud@arts.gov.

***Poetry Out Loud* on XM Radio**

Poetry Out Loud is now featured on XM Radio as part of the NEA Literary and Jazz Moments series. The NEA Moments series debuted in January 2007 and runs in random rotation on XM channels such as CNN, Take 5, Oprah and Friends, and Fox News. These radio spots feature performances, readings, and comments by legendary and contemporary artists, and highlight NEA programs such as *NEA Jazz Masters* and *The Big Read*. The new *Poetry Out Loud* Literary Moments feature recitations by 2006 state champions.

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.

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.

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