



**For Immediate Release**

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**Poetry Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts Announce the National Finals of Poetry Out Loud: National Recitation Contest**

***State recitation champions to compete before special guest judges in Washington, DC***

CHICAGO — The Poetry Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) 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. High school students who advanced from 51 poetry recitation championships in every state and the District of Columbia will gather at the historic Lincoln Theatre in Washington, DC to match their skills in poetry memorization and recitation. Celebrity judges, including poetry advocate Caroline Kennedy, Pulitzer Prize-winning literary critic Michael Dirda, and best-selling authors Azar Nafisi and Curtis Sittenfeld, will assess the students' presentations. Scott Simon of National Public Radio will serve as master of ceremonies.

"By memorizing a poem, a student gets a profound and intimate understanding of that work of literature," said NEA Chairman Dana Gioia. "Furthermore, the experience of reciting a poem before their peers and the public will strengthen 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 capitalizing on the latest trends in poetry - recitation and performance. The program builds on the resurgence of poetry as an oral art form, as seen in the slam poetry movement and the immense popularity of rap music among youth. *Poetry Out Loud* invites the dynamic aspects of slam poetry, spoken word, and theater into the English classroom. Through *Poetry Out Loud*, students can master public speaking skills, build self-confidence, and learn about their literary heritage.

**PARTNERS**

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**Poetry Foundation**  
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“The public recitation of great poetry is a way to honor the speaker, the poem, and the audience all at once. To learn a great poem by heart is to make a friend for life,” said John Barr, president of the Poetry Foundation.

At the National Finals, students grouped according to six geographic regions will compete in three day-time semifinal rounds. From there, twelve students will advance to compete in the evening finals. Judges will evaluate each student performance on criteria such as volume, presence, evidence of understanding, level of difficulty, and accuracy. Students have prepared to perform three poems featured in the *Poetry Out Loud* print and online anthologies. Some of the poems that have helped bring state winners to the National Finals include “The Pow Wow at the End of the World” by Sherman Alexie, “The Secret Garden” by Rita Dove, and “The Maldive Shark” by Herman Melville.

### **Partnerships with state and local organizations**

The National Finals are the culmination of efforts by many partners, including State Arts Agencies, schools, and tens of thousands of students. The NEA and the Poetry Foundation each have contributed \$500,000 towards the 2006 *Poetry Out Loud* program in support of materials, grants, prizes and the National Finals. NEA grants to State Arts Agencies enabled them to implement the program in high schools in each state capital region, often in collaboration with local literary organizations. The NEA and the Poetry Foundation also provided free, standards-based curriculum materials for use by participating schools. These materials include print and online poetry anthologies containing more than 400 classic and contemporary poems, a teacher’s guide to help instructors teach recitation and performance, and a CD featuring well-known actors and writers such as Anthony Hopkins, James Earl Jones, Alyssa Milano, David Schwimmer, and N. Scott Momaday. The *Poetry Out Loud* National Finals will be administered by the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation.

### **Contests and prizes**

Since January, schools in every state and the District of Columbia have taken part in the pyramid structure competition. At the classroom level, teachers have introduced students to the poems and educational resources, later leading students in classroom and then schoolwide competitions. Many states held their state capital region finals in April as part of their National Poetry Month observances. Several states including Delaware, Pennsylvania, Nevada, and Wyoming, expanded their contests to statewide competitions. Schools that have not participated in the official 2006 *Poetry Out Loud* program are welcome to conduct their own contests using the online resources at [www.poetryoutloud.org](http://www.poetryoutloud.org). *Poetry Out Loud* will award a total of more than \$100,000 to state- and national-level winners. Each state-level final awarded \$1,000 in prizes to the finalist, the runner-up, and their schools and each state finalist received an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, DC. At the *Poetry Out Loud* National Finals, a total of \$50,000 in scholarship prizes and school stipends will be awarded, including \$20,000 for the *Poetry Out Loud* National Champion.

### **National Finals at the Lincoln Theatre**

The *Poetry Out Loud* National Finals take place on Tuesday, May 16, from 7:30 – 9:30 p.m. the Lincoln Theatre, 1215 U Street, NW. The National Finals are free and open to the public. All attendees for the 7:30 p.m. event must have tickets. Free tickets may be picked up at the Lincoln Theatre box office, open Monday through Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Reservations are not required for this event.

**About the Poetry Foundation**

The Poetry Foundation, publisher of *Poetry* magazine, has embarked on an ambitious plan to bring the best poetry before the largest possible audience. The Foundation has launched a major new poetry website ([www.PoetryFoundation.org](http://www.PoetryFoundation.org)) and recently released an unprecedented study to understand poetry's place in American culture. Founded in Chicago by Harriet Monroe in 1912, *Poetry* is the oldest monthly devoted to verse in the English-speaking world. Harriet Monroe's "Open Door" policy, set forth in Volume I of the magazine, remains the most succinct statement of *Poetry's* mission: to print the best poetry written today, in whatever style, genre, or approach.

**About the National Endowment for the Arts**

This year, the National Endowment for the Arts marks its 40th anniversary of leadership in the arts. The NEA 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 Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation**

Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation celebrates and supports the wealth and diversity of the region's arts resources and works to make those resources widely accessible both in the region and beyond. To learn more about MAAF, its programs and services, visit our Web site at [www.midatlanticarts.org](http://www.midatlanticarts.org).