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

High school students across the nation to compete in national poetry recitation contest

Pittsburgh, PA — The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the Poetry Foundation announce *Poetry Out Loud: National Recitation Contest*, the expansion phase of a program that encourages high school students to learn about great poetry through memorization, performance, and competition. Starting in early 2006, schools in each state capital region will participate in classroom and schoolwide contests, advancing to state competitions next April. The NEA will host the *Poetry Out Loud* National Finals, to take place on May 16 in Washington, DC.

The NEA's landmark report "Reading at Risk" found a dramatic decline in literary reading, especially among younger readers. *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 class. Through *Poetry Out Loud*, students can master public speaking skills, build self-confidence, and learn about their literary heritage.

"Learning great poetry by heart develops the mind and imagination," said Dana Gioia, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts. "It isn't just an arts program. By

immersing themselves in powerful language and ideas, the students will develop their ability to speak well, especially in public. This is a skill they will use in the workplace and the community for the rest of their lives.”

Announced at the annual convention of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) in Pittsburgh, PA, *Poetry Out Loud* is an expansion of the pilot phase launched last school year, in which the NEA and the Poetry Foundation conducted competitions in Washington, DC, and Chicago, IL. Last year, more than 4,000 students participated in the program; at least 250,000 students are expected to participate in the 2006 *Poetry Out Loud* program.

“The public recitation of great poetry,” said John Barr, President of the Poetry Foundation, “is a way to honor the speaker, the poem, and the audience all at once. *Poetry Out Loud* brings new energy to an ancient art by returning it to the classrooms of America.”

Partnership with state arts agencies

The NEA and the Poetry Foundation have each contributed \$500,000 towards the 2006 *Poetry Out Loud* program in support of materials, grants, prizes and the National Finals next May. This fall, the NEA will award grants to State Arts Agencies to help implement the program in at least 10 to 30 high schools in each state capital region. Additionally, the NEA and the Poetry Foundation will provide State Arts Agencies with free, standards-based curriculum materials for use by participating schools. These materials include print and online poetry anthologies, a program guide to help instructors teach recitation and performance, and an audio CD featuring well-known actors and writers such as James Earl Jones, Anthony Hopkins, Alyssa Milano, and N. Scott Momaday. Program materials are available for download on the new website, www.poetryoutloud.org, which offers additional resources.

How to get involved in *Poetry Out Loud*

High school teachers who are interested in participating in *Poetry Out Loud* should know that the program requires less than two or three weeks of class time. Participating schools are expected to run their program between January and March. States will hold their final contests in April, and the National Finals will take place on May 16, 2006, in Washington, DC. High schools that wish to be part of the official *Poetry Out Loud* program must contact their State Arts Agency to participate. State Arts Agencies will determine which schools are eligible to take part in the official *Poetry Out Loud* program. Schools that are not in the official program may conduct their own contests using the online resources. Visit www.poetryoutloud.org for more information.

Poetry Out Loud Prizes

Students who participate in the official *Poetry Out Loud* program may be eligible to compete in the State and National Finals next April and May. Each winner at the state

level will receive \$200 and an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, DC, to compete for the national championship. The state winner's school will receive a \$500 stipend for the purchase of poetry books. One runner-up in each state will receive \$100, with \$200 for his or her school library. *Poetry Out Loud* will award a total of \$50,000 in scholarships and school stipends at the National Finals, with at least a \$20,000 college scholarship for the *Poetry Out Loud* National Champion.

The *Poetry Out Loud* National Finals will be administered by the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation, which celebrates, promotes, and supports the richness and diversity of the region's arts resources, and works to increase access to the arts and cultures of the region and the world.

For further information on *Poetry Out Loud*, visit www.poetryoutloud.org.

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. In the coming year, the Foundation will launch a major new poetry website and sponsor 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

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 Endowment is the nation's largest annual funder of the arts, bringing great art to all 50 states, including rural areas, inner cities, and military bases.

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