

Poetry Out Loud and American Sign Language: Guidance for Teachers

In the Classroom

Students who are deaf or hard of hearing may choose to recite their poems in American Sign Language (ASL). All students select poems to perform from the official print or online Poetry Out Loud anthologies. After selection, a deaf student would translate the English text into ASL in order to interpret the work in a visual format.

Since poems composed exclusively in ASL are not currently included in the Poetry Out Loud anthology, students are encouraged to choose poems they can successfully translate to ASL. Translations must pay attention to mood, context, register, and handshape repetition. Students are responsible for creating a complementary interpretation that takes into account appropriate literary devices, such as length and scope of the poem, subject matter, underlying theme, tone, and intent of the poet. The translation should be the student's own work. To guide students in poem selection and ASL translation, we recommend providing support through an appropriate teacher or visiting artist.

Students reciting in ASL should work with their teacher to identify the best environment for rehearsing their recitations. This may be at home with a parent, after school with a mentor, or in class with an appropriate partner.

In Competition

Participating schools with students reciting in ASL should not hold a separate competition for these students. They must be able to participate fully in all levels of official classroom and school competition.

During classroom competitions, as a student is reciting in ASL, the English text of their poem should be made visible to other students so that students not fluent in ASL may easily follow along. The poem could be projected or copied on the blackboard, out of view of the reciter. (Handing out a hard copy of the text will likely distract students, making it difficult for them to give the performance their complete attention.) Recitations performed in ASL will be evaluated under the same judging criteria as verbal performances. Please consult the [Poetry Out Loud Judge's Guide](#) and the [Judge's Guide ASL Addendum](#) for further information on judging ASL recitations.

Within the context of Poetry Out Loud, teachers may have the opportunity to introduce ASL recitation to their classes. Many students and parents will be unfamiliar with ASL recitation. It's helpful to remind everyone that there are more similarities than differences between a spoken poem and a signed poem. Rhyming, alliteration, voice, and articulation can all be represented in a visual context. A visual recitation will reflect the same desirable (or undesirable) traits as a verbal performance.

Questions

For additional information on Poetry Out Loud and ASL, please contact your [state coordinator](#) or the national program at poetryoutloud@arts.gov.