

What is Poetry Out Loud®?

Poetry Out Loud lifts poetry off the page, creating community and connection. Through this program, high school students across the country participate in a dynamic poetry recitation competition that is designed to improve their public speaking skills, help build confidence, and teach them about literary history and contemporary life.

A program of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with participating state and jurisdictional arts agencies and administered by Mid Atlantic Arts, Poetry Out Loud provides free lesson plans and other educational materials to teachers and organizers, including an online anthology of classic and contemporary poems.

The program starts at the local level with a school or participating organization. Winners then may advance to a regional and/or state competition, and ultimately to the national finals.

Since the program began in 2005, more than 4.6 million students and 89,000 teachers from 22,000 schools across the U.S. have participated in Poetry Out Loud.

Do students recite their own poetry?

No, students recite poetry from the Poetry Out Loud anthology of classic and contemporary poems. While creative writing is a natural complement to Poetry Out Loud, students do not write or recite their own poetry as part of the official competition. Only poems included in the catalog as of September 1, 2026, may be recited in the official 2026-2027 competition.

What are the prizes?

National Level: A total of \$50,000 in awards and school or organizational stipends will be given at the Poetry Out Loud National Finals:

- \$20,000 for the National Champion
- \$10,000 for 2nd place
- \$5,000 for 3rd place
- \$1,000 for 4th–9th places
- The representing schools/organizations of each of the top nine finalists receive \$500 for the purchase of poetry materials.
- There will be one honorable mention in each of the three national semifinal competitions. Those students will not advance to the finals, but will each receive a \$1,000 cash award and a \$500 stipend for their school/organization.

State Level:

- \$200 for each first-place winner
- \$500 for poetry materials for each first-place winner's school or organization
- \$100 for one runner-up in each state

- \$200 for the purchase of poetry materials for each runner-up's school or organization.

Awards and placements are determined solely by judges' scores based on the Poetry Out Loud Evaluation Criteria. Mid Atlantic Arts provides and administers all aspects of the monetary prizes awarded for Poetry Out Loud.

Are there any participation restrictions?

Only currently enrolled students in grades 9-12 are eligible to participate in the official competition, with an exception made for 8th-grade students participating in a 9th- through 12th-grade class. A student may not advance to the state finals without competing in a lower-level competition.

No student may be excluded from participating in Poetry Out Loud on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, disability, or national origin. Schools may determine eligibility for classroom and school level Poetry Out Loud programming pursuant to local and state law. A National Champion is not eligible to compete in future years. For prize information, please go to our [Rules page](#).

Students may compete at either their high school or a local participating organization—they may not compete with both.

How can I get my class, school, or organization involved in Poetry Out Loud?

Participating state and jurisdictional arts agencies recruit high schools and local organizations to participate in the official Poetry Out Loud program. You must first contact your state's Poetry Out Loud coordinator to find out more information on how to sign up your school or organization to participate. You will then work with the state coordinator to get the program up and running in your school. We provide all the necessary materials for Poetry Out Loud on [this website](#).

Contact your [State Coordinator](#) to get involved.

Are schools and organizations that are not part of the official competition welcome to participate in other ways?

All of the Poetry Out Loud program materials are available for free online in the [Teachers & Organizers](#) section of the website. Using these online materials, schools and organizations are welcome to conduct their own "unofficial" poetry recitation competitions and introduce their students to classic and contemporary poetry. These unofficial competitions are ineligible for prizes administered by Mid Atlantic Arts.

How much class time does Poetry Out Loud take to run?

The official Poetry Out Loud program is implemented in schools in the fall and early winter. The program does not require full class periods and can be completed in 2-3 weeks. There are, however, many opportunities to make Poetry Out Loud part of a larger poetry curriculum.

Can students choose poetry outside of the poems in the anthology?

No—only poems in the anthology on the Poetry Out Loud website are eligible. The final anthology will be available on September 1, 2026, and no further changes will be made until the completion of the 2026-2027 Poetry Out Loud competition.

What are the poem selection criteria for the 2026-2027 Poetry Out loud competition?

At the state and national finals, students must have three poems prepared. One must be 25 lines or fewer and one must be published before 1930. One poem may be used to meet both criteria and may be the student's third poem.

What are the judging criteria?

All competitors are evaluated on the following criteria:

- Physical presence
- Voice and articulation
- Interpretation
- Evidence of understanding
- Overall performance
- Accuracy

For more information regarding these criteria, please consult the teacher's guide.

Where are the National Finals held?

The National Finals are held in Washington, DC, each spring, bringing together the state and jurisdictional champions to the nation's capital for two days of competition.