

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS
and
POETRY FOUNDATION
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For Immediate Release
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Alabama State Council on the Arts names State Champion for Poetry Out Loud

Saturday, February 28th, 2009, students converged in Montgomery from high schools all over the state to compete in the state finals of the Poetry Out Loud competition. In the threat of tornados and drenching downpours, seventeen students, their teachers and parents arrived at Smith Recital Hall at Huntingdon College to recite their poems. These students, already winners in their own regions, gave moving renditions of poetry from well-known poets such as Langston Hughes, Dudley Randall and Edgar Allen Poe. The students also performed their own original poems about truth and friendship, personal identity and tragic life experiences. It was a day filled with laughter, thoughtfulness and tears, proving to all that Alabama students have the power to speak with voices very much worth hearing.

First place in the Poetry Out Loud National Competition went to Sohaila Nikoufar, a 12th grade student at Loveless Academic Magnet Program High School in Montgoemry. Sohaila began competing in Poetry Out Loud in her 10th grade year and has placed near the top each year. This time, she will be the one to travel to Washington D.C. in April, all expenses paid, to represent Alabama in the National Finals. Other 10th graders in the competition took heart and vowed to emulate her persistence. Her

schoolmate Amy Pippin placed second. Both winners are students of Sharon Garrison, who teaches English at LAMP High School. Ms. Garrison is no stranger to the program as this is the third time one of her students will travel to Washington D.C.

First place in the Original Poetry Competition went to Elizabeth Brasseale, a 12th grade student from Catholic High School in Huntsville. Second place went to Jesse Lawrence Schaffer from St. Bernard Preparatory High School in Cullman.

Poetry Out Loud is a national arts education program presented by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Poetry Foundation in partnership with state arts councils nationwide. It encourages the mastery of great poetry by offering educational materials and a dynamic competition to high schools across the country. *Poetry Out Loud* uses a pyramid structure. Beginning at the classroom level, winners advance to a school-wide competition, regional competitions, the state competition, and ultimately to the National Finals in Washington, DC.

The winners state finals of the Poetry Out Loud are awarded \$200, and each of their schools receive a \$500 stipend for the purchase of poetry books. The second place winners receive \$100, and their schools each receive \$200 for their school libraries. The Original Poetry competition winners in Alabama receive books that encourage their independent writing. The *Poetry Out Loud* National Finals will award a total of \$50,000 in scholarships and school stipends, with a \$20,000 college scholarship for the *Poetry Out Loud* National Champion.