



For Immediate Release

May 17, 2006

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

***Columbus Alternative High School senior Jackson Hille wins first prize
among 12 finalists from around the country***

Washington, DC—Ohio high school student Jackson Hille humorously explored the trials of aging in a recitation of the poem “Forgetfulness,” by Billy Collins, helping win Hille the title of *Poetry Out Loud* national champion. The *Poetry Out Loud* National Finals were held last night at the historic Lincoln Theatre in Washington, DC. Hille was among 12 finalists and 51 state champions from around the country who participated in the first national poetry recitation contest, sponsored by the Poetry Foundation and the National Arts Endowment.

“I feel incredibly honored and grateful to compete with such strong competitors,” said Hille, who said he first started reciting poetry when a teacher offered him extra credits to take part in the program. “As I kept winning competitions, I realized that poetry was a powerful thing, that the person reciting the poem is a vessel between the poem and the audience.”

Hille received a \$20,000 scholarship prize as *Poetry Out Loud* national champion. The second place winner was Teal Van Dyck, a senior at Bow High School in New Hampshire, who received a \$10,000 scholarship prize. Also receiving top honors was Kellie Taulia Anae, a senior at the Mid Pacific Institute in Hawaii, who received the third place prize and a \$5,000 scholarship prize. The schools of the top 12 finalists each received \$500 for the purchase of poetry books.

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The other 12 finalists included Kendra Holloway of Kentucky; Riva Y. Dumont of Maine; Aislinn Lowry of Missouri; Ryan Arthur Berry of North Dakota; Alexzandria Ward of Oklahoma; Michael Santiago of Oregon; Chris Estevez of Pennsylvania; Kayla Jackmon of South Dakota; and Anjuli Joshi Brekke of Wisconsin.

Special guest judges presided over the competition, including poetry advocate Caroline Kennedy; Pulitzer Prize-winning literary critic Michael Dirda; best-selling authors Azar Nafisi and Curtis Sittenfeld; and author, poet, and former NEA Deputy Chairman A.B. Spellman. Scott Simon, host of National Public Radio's Weekend Edition, served as master of ceremonies.

The *Poetry Out Loud* National Finals featured three rounds of daytime semifinals from which 12 finalists advanced to compete in the evening national finals. The event was the culmination of a pyramid structure competition that began in January among schools in every state and the District of Columbia. At the classroom level, teachers have introduced students to the poems and educational resources, later leading students in classroom and then schoolwide competitions. Several states including Delaware, Pennsylvania, Nevada, and Wyoming, expanded their contests to statewide competitions. *Poetry Out Loud* awarded 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. Each state champion 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 was awarded.

The NEA and the Poetry Foundation each 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 included print and online poetry anthologies containing more than 400 classic and contemporary poems; a website (www.poetryoutloud.org); 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 were administered by the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation.

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.

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) 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.