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NEA Contact: Sally Gifford, 202-682-5606
Poetry Foundation Contact: Anne Halsey,
312-799-8016

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS AND POETRY FOUNDATION ANNOUNCE
THE 2009 NATIONAL FINALS OF *POETRY OUT LOUD: NATIONAL RECITATION CONTEST*

Singer-songwriter Natalie Merchant to perform poetry-inspired work

WASHINGTON, DC – At the end of National Poetry Month in April, 53 high school students will walk onstage in a competition against their peers, armed only with poems they have memorized and made their own. One will walk away with the title of *Poetry Out Loud* National Champion and a \$20,000 award, the culmination of the fourth annual *Poetry Out Loud: National Recitation Contest*. The National Finals take place on April 27-28 at the Lisner Auditorium in Washington, DC. Award-winning actress Tyne Daly, *A Prairie Home Companion*'s Garrison Keillor, journalist Jeffrey Brown, founder of Quest: arts for everyone Tim McCarty, and poets Luis Rodriguez and Patricia Smith, among others, will judge the *Poetry Out Loud* National Finals. This year's program will also feature a performance by singer-songwriter Natalie Merchant, a member of the New York State Council on the Arts, who is developing a collection of songs adapted from classic and contemporary poetry. Scott Simon of National Public Radio returns to serve as master of ceremonies.

Poetry Out Loud is a partnership initiative of the Poetry Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts that encourages the study of great poetry by offering educational materials and a dynamic recitation competition to high schools across the country. The contest was designed to revive the art of recitation and combat the declining rates of poetry reading as shown in recent NEA research (*Reading on the Rise* [2008], *Reading at Risk* [2004]). *Poetry Out Loud* provides students an opportunity to master public speaking skills, build self-confidence, and learn about their literary heritage. Now in its fourth year of national competition, *Poetry Out Loud* has inspired hundreds of thousands of high school students to discover a broad spectrum of classic and contemporary poetry, from Emily Dickinson to Sherman Alexie.

“Teachers and students alike have informed us that participation in *Poetry Out Loud* is transformative,” said NEA Acting Chairman Patrice Walker Powell. “The competitive aspect draws in a wide range of students, and the contest has generated a newfound excitement for poetry that schools and communities have embraced.”

“To learn a great poem by heart is to make a friend for life,” said John Barr, president of the Poetry Foundation. “The national recitation program brings fresh energy to an ancient art form by returning it to the classrooms of America.”

Poetry Out Loud Partnerships

The National Finals are the culmination of efforts by many partners. As national partners, the NEA and the Poetry Foundation have contributed support for administration of the program, educational materials, and prizes for both the state and national finals. State Arts Agencies implemented the program in high schools in each state and organized state competitions, often in collaboration with local arts organizations. The *Poetry Out Loud* National Finals will be administered by Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation.

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Poetry Out Loud Educational Materials

The NEA and the Poetry Foundation provide free, standards-based curriculum materials for use by participating schools. These materials include print and online poetry anthologies containing more than 600 classic and contemporary poems, a teacher's guide, and a CD about the art of recitation featuring well-known actors and writers such as Anthony Hopkins, James Earl Jones, Alyssa Milano, and N. Scott Momaday. Schools that are not part of the official *Poetry Out Loud* competition are welcome to conduct their own contests using the online resources at www.poetryoutloud.org.

Contests and Awards

Poetry Out Loud uses a pyramid structure. Between September 2008 and February 2009, teachers at schools across the country introduced students to the poems and educational resources, later conducting classroom and schoolwide competitions. State contests were held by mid-March; fifty-three champions from each state, Washington, DC, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands will compete at the National Finals. A record-breaking 300,000 students from more than 1,700 high schools have taken part in the 2008-2009 *Poetry Out Loud* program.

The *Poetry Out Loud* National Finals will award a total of \$50,000 in awards and school stipends for the purchase of poetry books. Awards include \$20,000 for the *Poetry Out Loud* National Champion, and \$10,000 and \$5,000 for the second- and third-place finalists. Each state-level final has awarded \$1,000 in cash prizes to the champion, runner up, and their schools. In total, *Poetry Out Loud* will award more than \$100,000 to state- and national-level winners.

National Finals at the Lisner Auditorium

The 53 champions will gather at the *Poetry Out Loud* semifinals on Monday, April 27, from 9:00 am to 8:00 pm at the Lisner Auditorium, George Washington University, 730 21st Street, NW, Washington, DC. Twelve finalists will advance to the National Finals, also held at the Lisner on Tuesday, April 28, from 7:00 to 10:00 pm. Both events are free and open to the public, no tickets or reservations are required. For more information on the competitions, call 202-682-5577.

About Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation

Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation supports the richness and diversity of the region's arts resources and promotes wider access to the art and artists of the region, nation and world. To learn more about MAAF, its programs and services, visit www.midatlanticarts.org.

About the Poetry Foundation

The Poetry Foundation, publisher of *Poetry* magazine and one of the largest literary organizations in the world, exists to discover and celebrate the best poetry and to place it before the largest possible audience. The Poetry Foundation seeks to be a leader in shaping a receptive climate for poetry by developing new audiences, creating new avenues for delivery, and encouraging new kinds of poetry through innovative literary prizes and programs. For more information, please visit www.poetryfoundation.org.

About the National Endowment for 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 annual national funder of the arts, bringing great art to all 50 states, including rural areas, inner cities, and military bases. For more information, please visit www.arts.gov.



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