

P O E T R Y



F O U N D A T I O N

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**Poetry Foundation and NEA Announce Youssef Biaz as
2011 National Winner of Poetry Out Loud**

High school student receives \$20,000 award in national poetry recitation contest

WASHINGTON, D.C. — From a competitive field of more than 365,000 students nationwide, 16-year-old Youssef Biaz of Auburn, Alabama, won the title of 2011 Poetry Out Loud National Champion at the National Finals held in Washington, D.C., on Friday, April 29. With his achievement, Biaz also received a \$20,000 award and his high school, Auburn High School, received a \$500 stipend for the purchase of poetry books.

The Poetry Out Loud National Finals were held at the historic Lincoln Theatre in Washington, D.C. Biaz was among nine finalists and 53 state champions from around the country who participated in the sixth national poetry recitation contest, sponsored by the Poetry Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Biaz's final recitation for the evening was "Filling Station," a poem by Elizabeth Bishop, one of the most highly regarded American poets of the second half of the twentieth century. Biaz said reciting the poem was the most exciting part of being part of this year's competition: "It was my favorite poem, and definitely my English teacher's favorite. I liked the challenge of presenting a poem in a female voice." Biaz also recited Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" and Robert Hayden's "Those Winter Sundays." An interview with Biaz is available [online](#).

When asked whether the experience and poems will stay with him, Biaz replied, "I could never stop reading poetry. I think it would be a tremendous loss if I did." Biaz's English teacher introduced the Poetry Out Loud program to his classes for the first time in 2010; that year, Biaz also served as Alabama State Champion and became one of nine students across the country to make it to the National Finals. Though he did not win, Biaz said he still remembers the poems that he recited for the 2010 Poetry Out Loud competition, in particular John Keats's "When I have Fears that I May Cease to Be."

The second-place winner in the 2011 Poetry Out Loud national competition was Victoria DiMartile of Fort Mitchell, Kentucky, who received a \$10,000 award. DeVonna Daisy Smith of Reading, PA, received the third-place prize and a \$5,000 award.

In addition, the 4th – 9th place finalists each received a \$1,000 award, and their schools received \$500 each for the purchase of poetry books. The other finalists were Samuel Opoku (Northglenn, CO); Morgan Joyce Williams (Springfield, IL); Kari Barclay (Bethesda, MD); Michaela DeAndra Murray (Dorchester, MA); Emily Orellana (Reno, NV); and Melissa Johnston (Brandon, SD).

Guest judges presiding over the final rounds of competition on Friday night included poets Valerie Martínez, Thomas Sayers Ellis, and Brian Turner; actress and author Amber Tamblyn; playwright Aditi Brennan Kapil; and the artistic director of the Shakespeare Theatre Company, Michael Kahn.

Guest judges evaluating recitations during the semifinal rounds on Thursday included Naomi Ayala, Ibtisam Barakat, Teri Ellen Cross Davis, Patricia Gray, Joseph O. Legaspi, Keith Leonard, Gary Logan, and Orlando Ricardo Menes.

On April 28, 53 high school students—Poetry Out Loud champions from every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands—recited poetry in three semifinal rounds based on geographic region. Nine students advanced to compete in the National Finals on April 29. Judges evaluated student performances on criteria including physical presence, articulation, evidence of understanding, level of difficulty, and accuracy. Students performed poems from the Poetry Out Loud print and online anthologies (www.poetryoutloud.org). The event was the culmination of a pyramid-structure competition that began last September in more than 2,255 high schools across the country.

The National Finals are the result of efforts by many 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. Each State Arts Agency implemented the program in high schools in each state, often in collaboration with local arts organizations. 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 building on the resurgence of poetry as an oral art form, as seen in the slam poetry movement and the popularity of rap music among youth. Through Poetry Out Loud, students can master public speaking skills, build self-confidence, and learn about their literary heritage. Now in its sixth year of national competition, Poetry Out Loud has inspired thousands of high school students to discover classic and contemporary poetry. To find out how to get involved in the 2012 Poetry Out Loud National Recitation Contest, visit www.poetryoutloud.org.

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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 650 classic and contemporary poems, a teacher's guide, video footage of performances from the National Finals, and audio tracks about the art of recitation. Schools are welcome to download these resources at www.poetryoutloud.org.

Contests and Awards

Using a pyramid structure, Poetry Out Loud starts with classroom and schoolwide activities and contests between September 2010 and February 2011. State contests were held by mid-March; the 53 champions of contests in every state, Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands, and Washington, DC compete at the national finals. The Poetry Out Loud National Finals will present 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 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.

Fast facts about Poetry Out Loud 2010–2011

- Total participating students in the 2010–2011 school year: 365,855
- Total participating schools in the 2010–2011 school year: 2,255
- Total participating teachers in the 2010–2011 school year, 5,020
- Total number of students nationwide who have competed in Poetry Out Loud over the past six years: 1.2 million
- States with the highest number of participating students in 2011: California, Florida, and Washington
- Participating State Schools for the Deaf or Deaf and Blind: Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Iowa, and Oregon
- Most frequently performed—and now retired—poem from the Poetry Out Loud anthology: “Still I Rise” by Maya Angelou

About the Poetry Foundation

The Poetry Foundation, publisher of *Poetry* magazine, is an independent literary organization committed to a vigorous presence for poetry in our culture. It 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 National Endowment for the Arts was established by Congress in 1965 as an independent agency of the federal government. To date, the NEA has awarded more than \$4 billion to support artistic excellence, creativity, and innovation for the benefit of individuals and communities. The NEA extends its work through partnerships with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector. To join the discussion on how art works, visit the NEA at www.arts.gov.

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 and its programs and services, visit www.midatlanticarts.org.

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