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'Poetry Out Loud' Winner Reads 'Frederick Douglass'

ROBERT SIEGEL, host:

Yesterday we brought you a story about Poetry Out Loud. That's a national recitation contest. This year about 2,000 high school students competed. And last night 12 finalists faced off for the national championship, reciting by memory poems by Edna St. Vincent Millay, Martin Espada and Cathy Song, among others.

MELISSA BLOCK, host:

BLOCK: And now, we bring you the winner - Shawntay Henry of St. Thomas in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Here is Ms. Henry with the poem "Frederick Douglass," written in the middle of the last century by Robert E. Hayden.

Ms. SHAWNTAY HENRY (Contest Winner): When it is finally ours, this freedom, this liberty, this beautiful and terrible thing, needful to man as air, usable as earth; when it belongs at last to all, when it is truly instinct, brain matter, diastole, systole, reflex action; when it is finally won; when it is more than the gaudy mumbo jumbo of politicians, this man, this Douglass, this former slave, this Negro, beaten to his knees, exiled, visioning a world where none is lonely, none hunted, alien, this man, superb in love and logic, this man shall be remembered. Oh, not with statutes' rhetoric, not with legends and poems and wreaths of bronze alone, but with the lives grown out of his life, the lives fleshing his dream of the beautiful, needful thing.

SIEGEL: Shawntay Henry, reciting the poem "Frederick Douglass" by Robert E. Hayden. Yesterday, with that performance she became the national champion of this year's Poetry Out Loud competition.