

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS
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**Poetry Foundation and NEA Announce
Amber Rose Johnson as 2010 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 nearly 325,000 students nationwide, 16-year-old Amber Rose Johnson of Providence, Rhode Island, won the title of 2010 Poetry Out Loud National Champion at the National Finals held in Washington, D.C., on Tuesday, April 27. With her achievement, Johnson also receives a \$20,000 award and her high school, Classical High School, receives a \$500 stipend for the purchase of poetry books.

The Poetry Out Loud National Finals were held at the George Washington University Lisner Auditorium in Washington, D.C. Johnson was among nine finalists and 53 state champions from around the country who participated in the fifth national poetry recitation contest, sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Poetry Foundation.

Her final recitation for the evening was “For My People” by Margaret Walker, a gripping poem about the resilience of African Americans, originally published in the November 1937 issue of *Poetry* magazine.

One of Johnson’s earlier recitations was William Shakespeare’s Sonnet 116, “Let me not to the marriage of true minds.” Actor and comedian John Leguizamo, who hosted the competition, asked Johnson why she selected the Shakespeare poem. “I chose 116 because I think the meaning of love gets distorted,” said Johnson. “It’s important to get back to the essence.”

“That’s what I tell my wife all the time,” said Leguizamo.

The second-place winner was Ruth Haile of Lincoln High School in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, who received a \$10,000 award. The Maryland state champion, Nora Sandler, of Richard Montgomery High School in Bethesda, received the third-place prize and a \$5,000 award.

In addition, the 4th- 9th place finalists received a \$1,000 award, and their schools received \$500 each for the purchase of poetry books. The other finalists were Youssef Biaz (Auburn, Alabama); Annette Putnam (Andover, Illinois); Diego Javier Steele (Lolo, Montana); Emily Orellana (Reno, Nevada); Tia Robinson (Warsaw, Virginia); and Madeline Bunke (Brookfield, Wisconsin).

Honorable mention awards went to Barbara Gooding of Frankfort, Kentucky; Brianna Anderson of West Fargo, North Dakota; and Shantelle Eddy, St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands.

Guest judges presiding over the final rounds of competition on Tuesday night included radio host Garrison Keillor, actress and activist Alfre Woodard, poets Valerie Martínez and Jane Shore, poet and critic Adam Kirsch, and 2009 Poetry Out Loud National Champion William Farley.

Guest judges evaluating recitations during the semifinal rounds on Monday included Francisco Aragón, Ibtisam Barakat, Holly Bass, Terry Blackhawk, Christian Conn, Patricia Gray, Doug Herbert, and Keith Leonard.

On April 26, 53 high school students—Poetry Out Loud champions from every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands—competed in three semifinal rounds of poetry recitations based on geographic region. Nine students advanced to compete in the National Finals on April 27. 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 1,998 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 fifth 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 2011 Poetry Out Loud National Recitation Contest, visit www.poetryoutloud.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.

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