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Poetry in motion: Recitation at Keystone Theatre

By: The Review



[Kasidy D. Benjamin of Towanda High recites a poem at the Keystone Theatre in Towanda.](#)

TOWANDA -- Several state officials were on hand Friday for the launching of the first regional Poetry Out Loud poetry recitation competition, which took place at the Keystone Theatre in Towanda.

Maximillian C. Esmus of Towanda High School won the regional competition, and will now compete against 11 other regional winners at the statewide Poetry Out Loud competition, which will take place at the governor's mansion in Harrisburg on April 10, said Michael Faison, program director of Pennsylvania's Arts in Education program.

The Poetry Out Loud Recitation Contest, a national competition for high school students, was created by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Poetry Foundation, according to a press release from the Bradford County Regional Arts Council.

During the competition, students memorize and perform great poems.

"The program builds on the resurgence of poetry as an oral art form, as seen in the slam-dunk poetry movement and the immense popularity of rap music among youth," the arts council said in its press release.

The Poetry Out Loud competition is being held for the first time this year, Faison said.

Poetry Out Loud is a program that encourages high school students to learn about great poetry through memorization, performance and

competition, the release said.

Starting in early 2006, schools in every region of Pennsylvania participated in classroom and school-wide Poetry Out Loud contests. The schoolwide winners advance to regional competitions and those winners to the state competition.

State champions will advance to the National Finals, to take place on May 16, 2006, in Washington, DC.

The students who reached the Bradford County-area regional contest, which took place Friday, were Kasidy Benjamin, Maximillian Esmus and Eric Smith from Towanda Area High School and Luke Poost from Wyalusing School District.

State Rep. Tina Pickett and state Sen. Roger Madigan attended the regional competition in Towanda on Friday. Through Poetry Out Loud, students can master public speaking skills, build self-confidence and learn about their literary heritage, the press release said.

"Learning great poetry by heart develops the mind and imagination," said Dana Gioia, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts. "It isn't just an arts program. By immersing themselves in powerful language and ideas, the students will develop their ability to speak well, especially in public. This is a skill they will use in the workplace and the community for the rest of their lives."

"The public recitation of great poetry," said John Barr, president of the Poetry Foundation, "is a way to honor the speaker, the poem, and the audience all at once. Poetry Out Loud brings new energy to an ancient art by returning it to the classrooms of America."

The NEA and the Poetry Foundation have each contributed \$500,000 toward the 2006 Poetry Out Loud program in support of materials, grants, prizes and the National Finals in May. The Bradford County Regional Arts Council has targeted several high schools in the region to participate in the Regional Competition. Additionally, the NEA and the Poetry Foundation provided the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and the Bradford County Regional Arts Council with free, standards-based curriculum materials for use by participating schools. These materials include print and online poetry anthologies; a program guide to help instructors teach recitation and performance; and an audio CD featuring well-known actors and writers such as James Earl Jones, Anthony Hopkins, Alyssa Milano and N. Scott Momaday. Program materials are available for download on the website www.poetryoutloud.org, which offers additional resources.

Poetry Out Loud Prizes

Poetry Out Loud will award a total of \$50,000 in scholarships and school stipends at the National Finals, with at least a \$20,000 college scholarship for the Poetry Out Loud national champion. Each winner at the state level will receive \$200 and an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, DC, to compete for the national championship. The state winner's school will receive a \$500 stipend for the purchase of poetry books and the classroom teacher of each winner at the regional competitions will receive a book of Pennsylvania poetry by Pennsylvania poets. One runner-up in each state will receive \$100, with \$200 for his or her school library. In addition, the Bradford County Regional Arts Council awarded regional winner Maximillian Esmus a \$50 gift card at Barnes and Noble; and first runner-up Lukas Poost, a \$25 gift card at Barnes and Noble.

All four participants at the Bradford County-area regional competition were invited to a workshop with Pennsylvania Council on the Arts directory artists Lawrence Bassett (writer) and Demond Wilson (theater). One of the goals of the workshop is to prepare Esmus for the state finals in Harrisburg.