

**MEDIA ADVISORY**

April 23, 2015

NEA Contact: Sally Gifford, 202-682-5606

Poetry Foundation Contact: Elizabeth Burke-Dain, 773-368-4928

**Poetry Out Loud 2015 National Finals  
Washington, DC, April 28-29, 2015**



WASHINGTON, DC –On Tuesday, April 28, 53 high school students who advanced from poetry recitation competitions in every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands will gather at Lisner Auditorium to match their skills in reciting classic and contemporary poetry in the 2015 National Semifinals of Poetry Out Loud: National Recitation Contest. Nine finalists will proceed to the National Finals on Wednesday, April 29, where they will vie for the title of National Poetry Out Loud Champion and a \$20,000 award. The top finalists and their schools will receive \$50,000 in awards. The Semifinals and Finals will be webcast live with viewing parties around the country. Poetry Out Loud is a partnership between the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the Poetry Foundation and is administered together with the State Arts Agencies of all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico.

**WHO:** Poetry Out Loud National Finals on April 29: Host Taylor Mali, award-winning stage and page poet. National Finals guest judges include poets Richard Blanco and Nikky Finney, writer and critic Maria Popova, novelist Brando Skyhorse, and educator Carol Jago. The featured performer is composer and multi-instrumentalist, Gabriel Kahane.

**WHEN/WHERE:** Poetry Out Loud National Semifinals – Tuesday, April 28, 9:00 am – 8:00 pm ET, Lisner Auditorium at The George Washington University, 730 21st Street, NW, Washington, DC. Media interviews offered after each round.

- 9:00 am – 12:00 pm - First Semifinal: students from East Central and Northeast States (in order: NY, RI, DE, CT, NH, ME, MA, PA, DC, SC, MD, NC, NJ, VT, WV, OH, USVI, VA)
- 1:00 pm – 4:00 pm - Second Semifinal: students from Midwest and South Central states (in order: NE, AR, WI, MS, IN, PR, KY, GA, LA, TN, MO, MI, OK, IL, FL, AL, KS, IA)
- 5:00 pm – 8:00 pm - Third Semifinal: students from Upper Northwest and Western states (in order: MN, CO, NM, MT, WA, NV, WY, ND, CA, UT, ID, OR, AK, TX, SD, HI, AZ)

**Congressional breakfast for 53 Poetry Out Loud champions –Wednesday, April 29, 9:00 am – 10:30 am ET.** Cannon Caucus Room, Cannon House Office Building, 27 Independence Ave SE, Washington, DC. The breakfast for all 53 champions will feature visits by Members of Congress. This event is not open to the public.

**Poetry Out Loud National Finals – Wednesday, April 29, 7:00 pm – 9:15 pm ET**, Lisner Auditorium, George Washington University, 730 21st Street, NW, Washington, DC. Pre-event interviews with the nine National Finalists take place from 6:00 – 6:30 pm. Post-event photos and interviews with Finalists, judges, and speakers take place onstage, 9:15 – 9:45 pm.

**OTHER:** The Poetry Out Loud Semifinals and National Finals are free and open to the public; no tickets or reservations are required. Both events will offer ASL interpretation. For more information call 202-682-5606 or visit [arts.gov](http://arts.gov).

**WEBCAST:** Watch the Semifinals and Finals through a closed captioned, [one-time-only webcast](#) at [arts.gov](http://arts.gov).

**PHOTOS/VIDEO:** Photos and video of #POL15 Semifinals and Finals will be available [at this link](#).

**FOLLOW:** Poetry Out Loud is on Twitter at @PoetryOutLoud and @NEAarts, #POL15.

**CONTACT:** Media must RSVP to Sally Gifford, NEA Public Affairs, 202-682-5606 or [giffords@arts.gov](mailto:giffords@arts.gov). Video crews covering the Wednesday night National Finals must arrive by 6:45 pm to reserve a space. No flash photography.

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NEA Contact: Sally Gifford, 202-682-5606  
Poetry Foundation Contact: Elizabeth Burke-Dain, 312-799-8016

### [Poetry Out Loud Celebrates its 10th Year at National Finals, April 28-29, 2015](#)

#### ***Join Poetry Out Loud Online via Live Webcast, Viewing Parties, and Social Media***



WASHINGTON, DC – Think poetry and competition don't mix? Nearly three million students and 9,500 schools would disagree with you. That's how many have participated in the ten years of the Poetry Out Loud National Recitation Contest—and the 2015 National Finals will take place on April 28-29 in Washington, DC. Poetry Out Loud is the nation's largest youth poetry recitation competition, and next month, high school students who advanced from a field of more than 365,000 students nationwide will gather in Washington, DC to match skills in reciting classic and contemporary poetry from Shakespeare to Maya Angelou. The top finalists and their schools will receive \$50,000 in awards, including \$20,000 for the National Champion. Award-winning poet Taylor Mali will host the Finals, and the roster of judges includes poets Richard Blanco and Nikky Finney, writer and critic Maria Popova, novelist Brando Skyhorse, and educator Carol Jago. The National Finals will also feature a performance by composer and multi-instrumentalist, Gabriel Kahane.

Celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, Poetry Out Loud is a partnership between the National Endowment for the Arts and the Poetry Foundation. The program encourages the study of great poetry by offering educational materials and a dynamic recitation competition to high school students across the country. Poetry Out Loud gives students an opportunity to master public speaking skills, build self-confidence, and learn about their literary heritage.

The 53 champions will gather at the Poetry Out Loud semifinals on Tuesday, April 28, from 9:00 am to 8:00 pm at Lisner Auditorium at The George Washington University, 730 21st Street NW, Washington, DC. Nine finalists will advance to the National Finals, also held at Lisner Auditorium, on Wednesday, April 29, from 7:00 to 9:15 pm. Both events are free and open to the public; no tickets or reservations are required.

"For a decade, Poetry Out Loud has proven to be transformative for nearly three million high school students, and tens of thousands of teachers in high schools across the nation. Programs like this are so important, and not just because it introduces the beauty of poetry to young people. NEA research shows that arts education is linked to many positive, long-term academic benefits, social benefits, and workforce benefits," said NEA Chairman Jane Chu. "Programs like Poetry Out Loud give our nation's youth access to arts education opportunities that will help them learn and succeed in life."

"Poetry Out Loud's tenth anniversary is an occasion for much celebration," said Robert Polito, president of the Poetry Foundation, "and a chance for us all to think anew about the role of poems in our lives and our cultures. To memorize and recite a great poem of the past or present, is to 'own' it in the most personal way in your body, your breath, and your spirit. Recitation is obviously an interpretive act, but also is creative, and often even self-transformative."

#### **Live Webcast and Viewing Parties**

Not in Washington, DC, but still want to see the competition? You can watch the entire semifinals and finals through a [live, one-time only webcast](#). You can also gather fellow poetry fans for a [Poetry Out Loud Webcast Viewing Party](#). [Register at arts.gov](#) and find tips on hosting your party, promotional materials, and details on other viewing parties around the country. Follow the Poetry Out Loud National Finals on Twitter at @PoetryOutLoud and @NEAarts, #POL15. For more information on the event, webcast, or viewing parties, visit [arts.gov](#) or call 202-682-5606.



## 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 supported the administration of the program, created educational materials, and funded awards for both the state and national finals. State arts agencies have implemented the program in high schools nationwide and organized state competitions, often in collaboration with local arts organizations. The Poetry Out Loud National Finals are administered by Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation.

Schools interested in registering for the 2015-2016 Poetry Out Loud contest should contact their state arts agency. More information is available at [www.poetryoutloud.org](http://www.poetryoutloud.org).

## Educational Materials, Contests, and Awards

Poetry Out Loud offers educators free standards-based curriculum materials, which include a poetry anthology with more than 900 classic and contemporary poems, a teacher's guide, lesson plans, and video and audio on the art of recitation. Schools are welcome to download these free resources at [www.poetryoutloud.org](http://www.poetryoutloud.org).

Using a pyramid structure, Poetry Out Loud started with classroom and schoolwide activities and contests between September 2014 and February 2015. State contests were held by mid-March; the 53 champions of contests in every state, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Washington, DC, compete at the National Finals. The Poetry Out Loud National Finals will present \$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. In total, Poetry Out Loud will award more than \$100,000 to state- and national-level winners and their schools.

## Fast Facts About #POL15

- Poetry Out Loud participation 2005-2015: 2.7 million students and 9,500 schools.
- 2014-2015 participation stats: 365,000 students, 9,000 teachers, 2,300 high schools.
- Top three most popular poems for 2014-15 season: "Abandoned Farmhouse" by Ted Kooser, "Across the Bay" by Donald Davie and "Fire and Ice" by Robert Frost.
- Number of repeat state champs at National Finals, 2005-2014: 42. Number of repeat schools at National Finals: 81, including five-timer Arvada/Clearmont High School (WY).
- States with the highest number of participating students in 2015: New Jersey, California, Washington, Massachusetts, and Maryland.
- Oldest and youngest poets represented in the 900+ poem anthology are Queen Elizabeth I (b. 1533) and Jamaal May (b. 1982).

## About Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation

Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation develops partnerships and programs that reinforce artists' capacity to create and present work, advance access to and participation in the arts, and promote a more sustainable arts ecology.

## About the NEA

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 \$5 billion to strengthen the creative capacity of our communities by providing all Americans with diverse opportunities for arts participation. 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 [arts.gov](http://arts.gov).



## 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 partnerships, prizes, and programs. For more information, visit [poetryfoundation.org](http://poetryfoundation.org).



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## **POETRY OUT LOUD 2014-2015 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **What is Poetry Out Loud: National Poetry Recitation Contest?**

Poetry Out Loud is a national arts education program that encourages the study of great poetry by offering educational materials and a dynamic recitation competition to high schools across the country. Poetry Out Loud uses a pyramid structure. Participating teachers use the Poetry Out Loud toolkit to teach poetry recitation and run classroom competitions. Students select, memorize, and recite poems from an anthology of more than 900 classic and contemporary poems. Beginning at the classroom level, winners will advance to the school-wide competition, then to the state competition, and ultimately to the National Finals in Washington, DC. More than 365,000 students and 9,000 teachers from more than 2,300 high schools took part in the 2014–2015 Poetry Out Loud program.

### **Where will Poetry Out Loud take place?**

State arts agencies in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands have enlisted high schools to participate in the official Poetry Out Loud program. For more information on state finals, visit [www.poetryoutloud.org](http://www.poetryoutloud.org).

### **When will Poetry Out Loud take place?**

Schools that are participating in the official competition will conduct their classroom and school-level programs and contests between September 2014 and February 2015. High school teachers who are interested in participating in Poetry Out Loud should know that the program takes one to three weeks of classroom time, and may be incorporated with existing poetry units. State contests will be held by late March 2015, and the National Finals take place April 28-29, 2015 in Washington, DC.

### **Who created Poetry Out Loud?**

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the Poetry Foundation created Poetry Out Loud. At the state level, each State Arts Agency (SAA) has received an NEA grant of \$17,500 to assist with expenses of program coordination and the state final event.

### **Who can participate in the official Poetry Out Loud contest?**

The official Poetry Out Loud contest is administered at the state level by state arts agencies in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. State arts agencies will define the scope of participation on a state-by-state basis. All types of high schools are welcome to participate, including public, private, parochial, independent, charter, etc. The official contest will be limited to schools identified by the state Poetry Out Loud coordinator. If you would like to get involved, contact your state arts agency at [www.poetryoutloud.org/state-contacts](http://www.poetryoutloud.org/state-contacts).

### **Are schools that are not part of the official contest welcome to participate in other ways?**

All schools nationwide may visit [www.poetryoutloud.org](http://www.poetryoutloud.org) for free program materials. Using these online materials, they are welcome to conduct their own “unofficial” poetry recitation competitions and introduce their students to classic and contemporary poetry.



### **Are program materials available?**

Poetry Out Loud offers educators free standards-based curriculum materials, which include a poetry anthology with more than 900 classic and contemporary poems, a teacher's guide, lesson plans, and video and audio on the art of recitation. Schools are welcome to download these free resources at [www.poetryoutloud.org](http://www.poetryoutloud.org).

### **Is there an award for state finalists?**

Each state final competition will award \$1,000 in cash and school stipends. Each champion at the state level will receive \$200 and an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, DC, to compete for the national championship. The state champion's school will receive a \$500 stipend for the purchase of poetry books. The first runner-up in each state will receive \$100, with \$200 for his or her school library.

### **What is the structure of the National Finals?**

On Tuesday, April 28, 2015, from 9:00 am to 8:00 pm, all 53 champions compete in three regional semifinals (17-18 students each compete in Eastern, Central, and Western/Pacific regional rounds). Each of the 53 will compete in two rounds of recitation and the top eight recite a third poem in round three. The top three contestants from each semifinal will advance to the National Finals on Wednesday, April 29. At the Finals, all nine will compete in two rounds of recitation. The top three advance to recite a third poem, and the contestant with the highest scores from all three rounds will be named Poetry Out Loud National Champion.

### **What are the judging criteria?**

All contestants are evaluated on these criteria: physical presence, voice and articulation, evidence of understanding, level of complexity, dramatic appropriateness, accuracy, and overall performance.

### **Are there awards at the National Finals?**

Poetry Out Loud will award a total of \$50,000 in awards and school stipends at the National Finals, including \$20,000 for the Poetry Out Loud National Champion, and \$10,000 and \$5,000 for the second- and third-place finalists. The fourth- to ninth-place finalists will each receive \$1,000. The schools of the top nine finalists will each receive \$500 for the purchase of poetry books. There will be one honorable mention in each of the three semifinals competitions. Those students will not advance to the finals, but will receive a \$1,000 cash award and \$500 school stipend.

### **How can I get more information?**

Visit [www.poetryoutloud.org](http://www.poetryoutloud.org) for more information on this program. The website features educational resources for teachers and students, including standards-based educational materials, tips on hosting a school contest, and videos of outstanding performances.

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Established by Congress in 1965, the NEA is the federal agency that supports and funds the arts to give all Americans the opportunity to experience creativity and participate in the arts. Through partnerships with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector, the NEA supports arts learning, affirms and celebrates America's rich and diverse cultural heritage, and extends its work to promote equal access to the arts in every community across America.

***The NEA provided early support for projects such as:***

- ***Vietnam Veterans Memorial design competition***
- ***Sundance Film Festival***
- ***Spoletto Festival USA***
- ***PBS's Great Performances***
- ***American Film Institute***

### **Grantmaking: Supporting thousands of activities across the country**

The NEA goes where many private funders do not go. It is the only funder, public or private, that supports the arts and creative activities in communities in all 50 states and U.S. territories. Since its inception, the NEA has awarded more than 145,000 grants totaling \$5 billion, encouraging creativity through support of performances, exhibitions, festivals, artist residencies, and other arts projects throughout the country. Nonprofit organizations apply through the NEA's funding categories for project support, individual writers and translators may apply for a fellowship, and the NEA manages honorific programs in jazz and the folk and traditional arts.

### **Partnerships: Leveraging resources and advancing work**

Forty percent of the Arts Endowment's funding goes to state and jurisdictional arts agencies and regional arts organizations to ensure support of the arts and creative activities at the local level. NEA funding also provides the validation that allows grantees to leverage additional support, making it possible for more people to experience the arts.

The NEA also works with more than 20 federal agencies, as well as with state and local governments, on projects that provide opportunities for all Americans to experience quality arts programming throughout the country. Other NEA partnerships include, [Blue Star Museums](#), [Mayors' Institute on City Design](#), [Strong Cities, Strong Communities](#), the [NEA/Walter Reed Healing Arts Partnership](#), and [Poetry Out Loud](#).

### **Research: Producing and funding reports to advance the arts in diverse areas**

The NEA is the only federal agency to conduct analyses of the value and impact of the arts in American life. The NEA Office of Research & Analysis produces research publications, conferences, and data sources on arts-related topics for diverse audiences. In recent years, the NEA launched a new research grant opportunity and convenes a [Federal Interagency Task Force on the Arts and Human Development](#).

### **Content: Offering free resources for learning about the arts and artists**

The NEA produces an extensive menu of free content including a [quarterly magazine NEA Arts](#), a [weekly podcast](#), and [daily blog, Arts Works](#), in addition to occasional webinars, webcasts, and videos to provide both information about arts funding and management as well as offer an intimate view of arts practitioners and their work.



**Jane Chu  
Chairman**



Jane Chu has been confirmed by the U.S. Senate in June 2014 as the 11th chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts.

Since 2006, Chu served as the president and CEO of the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts in Kansas City, Missouri, overseeing a \$413-million campaign to build the center. As the performance home of the Kansas City Ballet, Kansas City Symphony, and Lyric Opera of Kansas City, the Kauffman Center has hosted more than one million people from all 50 states and countries throughout the world since its grand opening in September 2011.

She was a fund executive at the Kauffman Fund for Kansas City from 2004 to 2006, and vice president of external relations for Union Station Kansas City from 2002 to 2004. Previously, she was vice president of community investment for the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation from 1997 to 2002. Chu also served as a trustee at William Jewell College and on the board of directors of the Ewing Marion Kauffman School and the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce.

Chu was born in Shawnee, Oklahoma, but was raised in Arkadelphia, Arkansas, the daughter of Chinese immigrants. She studied music growing up, eventually receiving bachelor's degrees in piano performance and music education from Ouachita Baptist University and master's degrees in music and piano pedagogy from Southern Methodist University. Additionally, Chu holds a master's degree in business administration from Rockhurst University and a PhD in philanthropic studies from Indiana University, as well as an honorary doctorate in music from the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory of Music and Dance.

**Organization:** The Poetry Foundation

**Website:** [www.poetryfoundation.org](http://www.poetryfoundation.org)



## **Description**

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.

## **Programming**

### **Poetry Out Loud**

*Poetry Out Loud: National Recitation Contest* is a partnership among the Poetry Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and state arts agencies. The program dynamically engages hundreds of thousands of high school students each year in exploring, closely reading, memorizing, and reciting classic and contemporary poetry.

### **Poetryfoundation.org**

Providing a collection of more than 12,500 classic and contemporary poems by more than 3,000 authors, as well as the current issue of *Poetry* magazine and its 103-year archive, poetryfoundation.org is the go-to site for both new and dedicated readers of poetry. The mobile-friendly website offers poetry journalism, poetry news at the *Harriet* blog, educational resources on our *Learning Lab*, podcasts and videos featuring interviews and commentary from some of poetry's most intriguing personalities, and much more. Mobile users can discover, share, and save favorite poems with the free POETRY app from the Poetry Foundation and subscribe to the digital version of *Poetry* magazine through the Apple Newsstand.

### **Library**

The Midwest's only library dedicated exclusively to poetry, the Poetry Foundation Library invites the reading of poetry through its collections and public programs. Visitors can browse a collection of more than 30,000 volumes, experience audio and video recordings in private listening booths, engage with gallery exhibitions, and explore with educational programs for children, students, and lifelong learners.

## **Events and Programs**

The Poetry Foundation presents a wide variety of free innovative programs, including readings, lectures, concerts, dramatic performances and multimedia events that feature both established and emerging poets.

## **Harriet Monroe Poetry Institute**

The Harriet Monroe Poetry Institute (HMPI), which operates in multiyear cycles, is a sort of “think tank” in the Poetry Foundation. HMPI will soon launch a series of enhanced digital poetry publications that explore how art gets made. Along with an authoritative text of a major book of 20th-century poetry, readers will have access to archival draft and revision materials, author audio and video, and annotation and commentary. Other HMPI projects include a digital mapping of poet John Ashbery's Hudson, New York, house via his work, and a digital anthology, *What Are Years*.

## **Poetry in the Media**

Through active media partnerships, the Foundation works to place poetry before the widest possible audience and raise it to a more visible and influential position in American culture. Poetry Foundation media sponsorships promote substantive poetry-related programming to an audience of over five million people each year by bringing an enhanced presence for poetry to each of the major media channels: print, radio, television, film and, new media.

## **Poetry Prizes**

The Poetry Foundation offers numerous Poetry Prizes including the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize, a lifetime achievement award; the Ruth Lilly and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Fellowships for young poets; and the Pegasus Awards, a family of prizes with an emphasis on presenting new awards to established and emerging poets.

Media Contact: Elizabeth Burke-Dain, Director of Marketing and Media, (312) 799-8016

## Poetry Foundation President Robert Polito



Poet and scholar Robert Polito was born in Boston, Massachusetts. He earned his PhD from Harvard and has served as director of Creative Writing at The New School for two decades. Polito became the second president of the Poetry Foundation in July 2013.

Polito's collections of poetry include *Hollywood & God* (2009) and *Doubles* (1995). His poetry blends narrative and lyric impulses, drawing on both American pop culture and literary tradition. Polito's scholarly works include *A Reader's Guide to James Merrill's The Changing Light at Sandover* (1995), and *Savage Art: A Biography of Jim Thompson* (1996), for which he received the National Book Critics Circle Award.

Polito's interest in mid-century American culture, especially the crime novel and film noir, has also led him to such editing projects as *Farber on Film: The Complete Film Writings of Manny Farber* (2009); *The Selected Poems of Kenneth Fearing* (2004); *Crime Novels: American Noir of the 1930s and 1940s* (1997) and *Crime Novels: American Noir of the 1950s* (1997); and editions of Dashiell Hammett and James M. Cain for Everyman Library. He has contributed a catalog essay to *About Face* (1985), a retrospective of Manny Farber's paintings; an essay on the Kinks for *This is Pop: In Search of the Elusive at Experience Music Project* (2004); an essay on Bob Dylan to *Studio A: The Bob Dylan Reader* (2005); and an essay on Allen Ginsberg to *"Howl": Fifty Years Later* (2006).

He is the recipient of numerous honors and awards including fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the Ingram Merrill Foundation. A contributing editor to

both *BOMB* and the *Boston Review*, Polito's poetry and criticism have been published widely. He is at work on a new book titled *Detours: Seven Noir Lives*.