

PRESS RELEASE

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South Burlington High School's Vera Escaja-Heiss Wins Vermont Poetry Out Loud State Championship for the Second Year St. Johnsbury Academy's Sam Bulpin is Runner Up

Montpelier – Vera Escaja-Heiss, a senior at South Burlington High School, took top honors at the Poetry Out Loud State Finals, held at Vermont PBS on March 18. This is the second year she has been named Vermont state champion. Sam Bulpin, from St. Johnsbury Academy, was the runner up. Escaja-Heiss and Bulpin were among ten finalists representing schools from across the state. The emcee for Vermont's Poetry Out Loud Finals was award-winning poet and Vermont Arts Council trustee [Major Jackson](#).

Escaja-Heiss made good use of her multi-lingual skills, securing the championship through flawless recitation of three poems, including *Harina de Castilla*, by Sandra M. Castillo and *El Olvido*, by Judith Ortiz Cofer.

Escaja-Heiss will now advance to the [2019 National Finals](#), to be held April 30 and May 1, 2019 at The George Washington University in Washington, D.C. She will receive \$200 in addition to an all-expense paid trip to Washington, D.C., for herself and a chaperone. South Burlington High School will receive a \$500 stipend for the purchase of poetry books. Bulpin will receive \$100, plus \$200 toward poetry books for St. Johnsbury Academy.

Students from fifty-three high schools—champions from every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands—will compete for a total of \$50,000 in scholarship awards and school stipends at the National Finals. The national champion will receive a \$20,000 college scholarship.

This year, more than five thousand Vermont students participated in classroom contests, with winners proceeding to school competitions. "Each of these students brought eloquence, courage, and vulnerability to the stage," said Vermont Arts Council Executive Director Karen Mittelman. "The process of sharing ourselves through the work of a great artist—whether it's a play, a symphony, or a poem—is a powerful way to create connection and community. Poetry allows us to recognize ourselves in someone else's words. That is just one of the many reasons we all need art in our lives."

The Poetry Out Loud program was created by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Poetry Foundation, and is administered statewide by the Vermont Arts Council. Now celebrating its fourteenth year in Vermont, Poetry Out Loud has inspired hundreds of thousands of American high school students to discover and know by heart classic and contemporary poetry.

MEDIA NOTE: Vera Escaja-Heiss is available for both taped and live interviews and recitations. Please contact Kira Bacon, communications director, 802.828.5422, kbacon@vermontartscouncil.org to make arrangements. Attached please find photos of Vera Escaja-Heiss and Ms. Escaja-Heiss with Sam Bulpin and Major Jackson (photo credit: Tom Pilon). More information about the 2019 Vermont Poetry Out Loud Competition is available on the [Vermont Arts Council website](#).

About the Vermont Arts Council

The Vermont Arts Council envisions a Vermont where all people have access to the arts and creativity in their lives, education, and communities. Engagement with the arts transforms individuals, connects us more deeply to each other, energizes the economy, and sustains the vibrant cultural landscape that makes Vermont a great place to live. Since 1965, the Council has been the state's primary provider of funding, advocacy, and information for the arts in Vermont. www.vermontartscouncil.org.