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### **Students Compete in Virtual Statewide 2021 Poetry Out Loud**

MONTPELIER, VT— Like most events in this most unusual pandemic year, the traditional excitement of an in-person Poetry Out Loud competition will necessarily take place online.

Presented in partnership with the Vermont Arts Council, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Poetry Foundation, Poetry Out Loud is a national program that encourages high school students to learn about great poetry—both classic and contemporary—through memorization, performance, and competition. Since the program began in 2005, more than four million students across the country have participated in Poetry Out Loud.

Here in Vermont, for the 2021 Poetry Out Loud competition, 60 teachers from 24 schools across the state registered to bring the program to their classrooms, reaching more than 1,500 students.

Sixteen high school students across Vermont were selected by their teachers as school champions and so will advance to participate in the 2021 statewide competition, which will be streamed at 7 p.m., Monday, March 15 on Vermont PBS's online OVEE platform.

Due to the pandemic, the school champions submitted their poetry recitations by video, which were evaluated by a panel of six judges.

One recitation video from each student will be aired, and a panel of six judges will also share their insights about this year's competition. Actor Andy Butterfield will emcee the event.

All 2021 judges are published Vermont poets. They are Frances Cannon, faculty member at Champlain College and Vermont College of Fine Arts; Rajnii Eddins, an activist and public speaker; Tina Escaja, a University of Vermont professor of Spanish and Director of Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies; Shanta Lee Gander, a multidisciplinary artist; Ruth Rodriguez, co-owner of Antidote Books in Putney; and Bianca Stone, Director of Programs at Ruth Stone House.

During the online event, this year’s champion and runner-up will be announced, and participants with the five highest cumulative scores will be recognized.

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

The state champion will receive \$200 and will advance to the national finals where \$50,000 in awards and school stipends will be distributed. The school of the state champion will receive \$500 for the purchase of poetry materials. The first runner-up in each state will receive \$100, with \$200 for his or her school library. The Poetry Foundation provides and administers all aspects of the monetary prizes awarded.

The 2021 National Semifinals will take place on Sunday, May 2, and the 2021 National Finals will take place on Thursday, May 27. Both will be video submission-based competitions and will be streamed on arts.gov.

To support the state’s Poetry Out Loud program each year, the Arts Council funds poetry recitation and creative writing workshops led by dynamic teaching artists and local poets. As in-person instruction was reduced this year, the Arts Council produced a series of instructional videos with local poets and actors for its YouTube channel.

“There are a lot of challenges for teachers and students this year and participating in a virtual event required extra time and effort from both teachers and students. But despite the challenges, the students seemed to dig deep into the Poetry Out Loud anthology to choose their poems, and this year’s competition features many poems that aren’t often recited in the Vermont events. It is great to hear their voices,” said Troy Hickman, Vermont Arts Council education programs manager.

Vermont Poetry Out Loud is supported by the Poetry Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the state of Vermont.

For more information about Vermont’s Poetry Out Loud, visit <https://www.vermontartscouncil.org/programs/poetry-out-loud>.

Vermont participating students:

School Name	School Champion Name
Bellows Free Academy	Owen Binniecki
Brattleboro Union High School	Hazel Kinnersly
Burr and Burton Academy	Irén Hangen Vázquez
Champlain Valley Union High School	Mary Amsbary
Hazen Union High School	Lilith Demers
Mount Mansfield Union High School	Nuala Dougherty
Rice Memorial High School	Greta Alexandra-Parker
South Burlington High School	Mollie Allen

Spaulding High School	Emily LaRose
St. Johnsbury Academy	Gavin Ghafoori
Stratton Mountain School	Benji Richards
Thetford Academy	Eloise Silver Van Meter
U-32 Middle High School	Thelonious Shores
Vermont Academy	Gary Zhu
Vermont Commons	Adelie Tebbetts
Williamstown Middle High School	Grace Brink

### **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. Learn more at [www.vermontartscouncil.org](http://www.vermontartscouncil.org)

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