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Katarina Agnew Named Alabama's Poetry Out Loud Champion

Montgomery, ALA -- On Monday, March 2, 2020, students from high schools all over the state converged on Montgomery to compete in the Alabama finals of the Poetry Out Loud National Recitation Competition. Students, their teachers, and parents arrived at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival to hear competing students recite poetry. These students, already winners in their own regions, gave moving renditions of poetry from well-known poets such as William Butler Yeats, Joy Harjo, and Julia Ward Howe. The students also performed their own original poems about personal identity, relationships and tragic life experiences. It was a day filled with laughter, thoughtfulness and tears, proving to all that Alabama students have the power to speak with voices very much worth hearing.

First place in the Alabama Poetry Out Loud National Recitation Competition went to Katarina Agnew, a senior at New Century High School in Huntsville. Katarina's teacher is Rebecca Savage Owens.

Katarina Agnew will be traveling to Washington, D.C. in May, with all expenses paid, to represent Alabama in the National Finals. Katarina's teacher, Rebecca Savage Owens (New Century Technology High School) will be there to celebrate her achievements. Soojin Park, a junior from Auburn High School (Teacher, Davis Thompson), came in second place. Honorable mentions were awarded to Aerianna Key'Sha Hubbard of Daphne High School (Teacher, Griffin Hood), Samuel Schultz of Randolph School (Teacher, Leslie Hodges), and Abigale Kulkarni of Bob Jones High School (Teachers, Nichole Murray and Mallory Poarch).

Alabama is one of the few states that includes an original poetry competition within its state poetry finals. Myra Ganine Grizzard, a student at the Alabama School of Fine Arts in Birmingham was selected as the original poetry winner with her two poems, *Water Girl Has No More Tears to Give* and *Columbus Day*. Second place in original poetry was Sija Brionne Headrick, a student at Bob Jones High School in Huntsville for her poems *Fireflies*



Alabama's Poetry Out Loud Winner, Katarina Agnew of New Century High School (Huntsville), with her teacher, Rebecca Savage Owens. Photography: Booker T. Washington Magnet High School Photography. Event photos: Baylie Tullo, Kylee Christianson

and *The Hope of Being*. An honorable mention in original poetry was awarded to Victoria Min Wang of Auburn High School for her poems *Ballerina* and *Undisclosed*.

Poetry Out Loud is a national arts education program presented by the [National Endowment for the Arts](#) and the [Poetry Foundation](#) in partnership with state arts councils nationwide. In Alabama, the [Alabama State Council on the Arts](#) partners with the [Alabama Arts Alliance](#). The program encourages mastery of great poetry by offering educational materials and a dynamic competition of high schools across the country. Poetry Out Loud uses a pyramid structure. Beginning at the classroom level, winners advance to a school-wide competition, regional competitions, the state competition, and ultimately to the National Finals in Washington, D.C.

Katarina Agnew, the winner of Alabama's Poetry Out Loud Competition is awarded \$200, and her school (New Century High School), receives a \$500 stipend for the purchase of poetry books. The second place winner, Soojin Park (Auburn High School), receives \$100, and her school receives \$200 for the school library. The Poetry Out Loud National Finals will award a total of \$50,000 in scholarships and school stipends, with a \$20,000 college scholarship for the Poetry Out Loud National Champion.

Alabama's original poetry winner Myra Ganine Grizzard (Alabama School of Fine Arts, Birmingham) was awarded \$200 from the Alabama Writers' Forum. Second place original poetry winner was Sija Brionne Headrick (Bob Jones High School, Madison), was awarded a prize of \$100 from the Alabama Writers' Forum.

All winners in the Alabama Poetry Out Loud were gifted with the book, *Beneath the Shadows: Legacy and Longing in the Antarctic*.

For additional information about this event, please contact Diana Green, Arts in Education Program Manager for the Alabama State Council on the Arts: 334-242-5148 or diana.green@arts.alabama.gov or Donna Russell, Executive Director, Alabama Arts Alliance, 334-269-1435 or drussell@alartsalliance.org.

