



For Immediate Release
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Nogales High School Student to Represent Arizona in National Poetry Recitation Competition

Over 11,000 Arizona high school students participated in Arizona Poetry Out Loud

PHOENIX, AZ (March 16, 2015) – Out of over 11,000 Arizona high school competitors from 47 participating schools, **Zaskia Villa**, a senior at Nogales High School in Nogales, Arizona, was selected as the Arizona *Poetry Out Loud* State Champion at the state finals event held on March 12, 2015 at the Herberger Theater Center in Phoenix. As State Champion, Villa will represent Arizona at the 10th annual *Poetry Out Loud* National Finals competition in Washington, D.C., in April.

A program of the **National Endowment for the Arts** and **The Poetry Foundation**, Poetry Out Loud is delivered in all 50 states and three territories through partnerships with the State Arts Agencies. The Arizona Poetry Out Loud program is managed and supported by the **Arizona Commission on the Arts**, an agency of the State of Arizona.

Participating students compete at the classroom and school level. This year, 43 school-level finalists competed in one of three regional competitions (northern, central or southern) to advance to the state level. Nine students – three from each region – advanced from each regional competition to compete in the State Finals:

Southern Region

- Lena Blackmon - University High School, Tucson, AZ
- Caitlin McCormick - The Gregory School, Tucson, AZ
- Zaskia Natalie Villa - Nogales High School, Nogales, AZ

Central Region

- Oluwatosin Babarinde - Brophy College Preparatory, Phoenix, AZ
- Kyras Berthiaume - McClintock High School, Tempe, AZ
- Hunter Hazelton - Betty Fairfax High School, Laveen, AZ

Northern Region

- Courtney Hale - Saint Michael Indian School, St. Michaels, AZ

- Jessica Han - Coconino High School, Flagstaff
- Adriana Hurtado - Tri-City College Prep, Prescott

As the Arizona *Poetry Out Loud* state champion, Villa receives a \$200 cash award and an all-expenses-paid trip for herself and a chaperone to the national finals, to be held in Washington, D.C., April 27-29th. Additionally, her school will receive \$500 to purchase poetry books for its library.

“The students work hard to get to the finals,” said Robert C. Booker, Executive Director of the Arizona Commission on the Arts. “Watching such a diverse group of exceptional young people from around the state stand tall, recite, and display their understanding and love of poetry is truly remarkable and inspirational. These young people learn skills through this competition that will serve them for a lifetime.”

Judges for the event included **Representative Juan Mendez**, who also offered opening remarks at the event; writer, performer and printmaker **Melissa Dunmore**; English Teacher and performer **Dr. Matthew Helmers**; storyteller, essayist and poet **Melanie Madden**; Kim Willey, a Program Manager at Free Arts of Arizona and former manager of Arizona’s *Poetry Out Loud* program; and Carly Bates, a student at Arizona State University who competed in Poetry Out Loud throughout high school.

Poet and teaching artist **Tomas Stanton** emceed the event. **Alberto Álvaro Ríos**, Arizona’s inaugural Poet Laureate, appeared as a special guest and recited some of his own work for an appreciative audience. **State Senator Andrea Dalessandro** and **Eleanor Billington**, Program Manager in the Literature & Arts Education Division of the National Endowment for the Arts, were also in attendance.

About *Poetry Out Loud*

Poetry Out Loud, a program of the National Endowment for the Arts and the Poetry Foundation, seeks to foster the next generation of literary readers by capitalizing on the latest trends in poetry—recitation and performance. Poetry Out Loud invites the dynamic aspects of slam poetry, spoken word, and theater into the English class. Through Poetry Out Loud, students can master public speaking skills, build self-confidence and learn about their literary heritage. For further information regarding Poetry Out Loud, visit www.poetryoutloud.org.

About the Arizona Commission on the Arts

One of 56 state and jurisdictional arts agencies across the United States, the Arizona Commission on the Arts is an agency of the State of Arizona that supports a statewide arts network. The Arizona Commission on the Arts supports access to quality arts and arts education opportunities for all Arizona citizens; the development and retention of statewide jobs in the nonprofit arts, culture and education sectors; and increased economic impact in local communities through arts-based partnerships that develop tax and small business revenue.

We imagine an Arizona where everyone can participate in and experience the arts.

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