

**For Immediate Release**

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**Desert View High School Senior Edgardo Aguilar is Arizona's Poetry Out Loud State Champion**

Edgardo Aguilar, a senior at Desert View High School in Tucson, will represent Arizona at the 14th Annual Poetry Out Loud national finals competition in Washington, DC, April 30-May 1, 2019.

The Arizona Poetry Out Loud State Finals were held at Burton Barr Central Library in Phoenix on Saturday, March 16. Ten students, representing schools from Tucson to Ganado, a chapter of the Navajo Nation, recited poems by a diverse array of literary luminaries, including Jimmy Santiago Baca, Maya Angelou, and Natalie Diaz. After two rounds of recitations, four students advanced to the final round. From these four, Edgardo Aguilar was named State Champion while Helena Häber, a senior at Arizona School for the Arts in Phoenix, was named first runner-up.

A program of the National Endowment for the Arts and The Poetry Foundation, Poetry Out Loud is a poetry recitation competition delivered in high schools in all 50 states and three territories through partnerships with State Arts Agencies. Arizona's Poetry Out Loud program is managed by the Arizona Commission on the Arts, an agency of the State of Arizona, with support from regional partners, University of Arizona Poetry Center, Phonetic Spit, and William Cordeiro, PhD, a Flagstaff-based poet and lecturer at Northern Arizona University.

**2019 Arizona Poetry Out Loud State Finalists:**

(students in **bold** advanced to final round)

- **Edgardo Aguilar, Desert View High School, Tucson**
- **Sylvia Dale, Ganado High School, Ganado**
- Sharmila Dey, University High School, Tucson
- Becca Driggs, Highland High School, Gilbert
- Zaquia George, City High School, Tucson
- **Helena Häber, Arizona School for the Arts, Phoenix**
- Aslihan Hadinoglu, Coconino High School, Flagstaff
- Abby Noel, Verrado High School, Buckeye
- Daniel Noon, Brophy College Preparatory, Phoenix
- **Sophie Weininger, Coconino High School, Flagstaff**

**2019 Arizona Poetry Out Loud Judging Panel**

An esteemed panel of judges evaluated the recitations, including two Poets Laureate:

- Dr. Rosemarie Dombrowski, Poet Laureate, City of Phoenix
- Joy Young, performance and teaching spoken word artist Phoenix
- Dr. Laura Tohe, Poet Laureate, Navajo Nation
- Cynthia Wheeler, Storyteller

“Beginner's luck or perhaps I have found something that calls to me”

Aguilar’s achievement is all the more impressive considering this is his first year participating in Poetry Out Loud.

Prior to the competition, Aguilar commented on his road to state finals: “Beginner's luck or perhaps I have found something that calls to me, either way, my first year of Poetry Out Loud has been quite a trip. I am just grateful to have made it this far.”

Aguilar was accompanied at the event by his coach and AP English Teacher, Teresa Driver.

As State Champion, Aguilar receives \$200 and an all-expenses paid trip to Washington, DC, (with an adult chaperone) to compete at the National Finals. Additionally, his school will receive a \$500 stipend for the purchase of poetry books. As runner-up **Häber** receives \$100 and her school receives \$200 for the purchase of poetry books.

Reflecting on his experience thus far, Aguilar said, “I only hope what I have learned from this situation brings me closer to becoming a decent human being.”

### The Competition Continues

The Poetry Out Loud national semifinals will be held in Washington, DC, on Tuesday, April 30, at Lisner Auditorium at The George Washington University. Nine finalists will then advance to the national finals, also held at Lisner Auditorium, on Wednesday, May 1.

A total of \$50,000 in scholarship awards and school stipends are awarded at the Poetry Out Loud National Finals, with a \$20,000 college scholarship award for the National Champion.

### 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](http://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 a 51-year-old agency of the State of Arizona and a leading force in the creative and professional development of Arizona’s arts sector. Through robust programs, research initiatives and strategic grantmaking, the Arts Commission catalyzes arts-based partnerships that strengthen Arizona communities through the arts.

For more information about the grants, services and programs of the Arizona Commission on the Arts, visit [www.azarts.gov](http://www.azarts.gov).

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

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