



Dear California Poetry Out Loud Participants:

YEAR SEVEN BEGINS! In California, there is an extraordinary opportunity for all high school students to learn about great poetry through memorization and performance.

On behalf of the California Arts Council, we want to invite your participation in *Poetry Out Loud: National Recitation Contest*, an exciting program taking place in high schools throughout the U.S. The National Endowment for the Arts, the nation's largest funder of the arts, and the Poetry Foundation, the nation's largest literary organization, have partnered with the California Arts Council to bring *Poetry Out Loud* to high schools across California. In California, another partnering organization is California Poets in the Schools (CPITS), a non-profit organization of published poets who work with teachers to bring their experience and love for their craft into the classroom, providing students of poetry with professional presentation and interpretation skills.

Poetry Out Loud builds on the recent resurgence of poetry as an oral art form, as demonstrated by the slam poetry movement and the immense popularity of rap music among our youth. The program encourages students, through the study of poetry, to master public speaking skills, build self-confidence, and internalize our rich literary heritage. The response California Poetry Out Loud has been so overwhelmingly positive that it is now being extended further throughout California. In 2011 thirty-four counties from San Diego to Siskiyou participated. California Poetry Out Loud is open to students in all kinds of high schools — public, private, parochial, independent, charter and home schooled students.

What is particularly exciting is that there are many ways that you, your colleagues, and your students may participate. This activity ties in closely with the State of California English Language Arts Standards, and it is an activity that will bring excitement to your classrooms and communities.

In this year of *California Poetry Out Loud*, interest in and enthusiasm about this program is building exponentially across our state, and our office is receiving numerous requests for information. We would like to send you the materials for 2012 as soon as possible. Please contact your local arts council to sign up to receive packets. Keep in mind one packet is available for each teacher participating in your school. The packet contains a teacher guide, posters, an audio guide on CD, and an anthology. The anthologies are meant for the teachers' use only and contain only around 120 poems. Students should click on the "POEMS" link on our website for a complete listing of the nearly 600 poems available for use in this national recitation contest.

We recommend that each school identify one or two teachers to serve as the coordinators of *Poetry Out Loud*. Duties for Lead Teachers will include enlisting fellow teachers to participate, distributing materials, organizing the school events, and keeping in touch with the State and County Coordinators.

Begin organizing your school event as early as possible in order to ensure greater attendance by the school community. County Competitions must take place no later than **February 18, 2012**. This means

school events should occur no later than **February 10, 2012**, but the earlier the better. Students need to know one poem for the Classroom Competition, two poems for the School and County Competitions and three poems for the State and National Competitions. The State Competition will be two days in Sacramento. The dates are Sunday, March 25, 2012 and Monday, March 26, 2012. We encourage students to select and learn two poems from the start so that they do not run out of time if there is a short turnaround between the Classroom, School and County Competition dates.

It is strongly recommended that students who compete beyond the classroom level select poems of various style, time period, and voice. Diversity in the selections will offer a richer and more complete performance. **Two criteria exist in the teacher's guide regarding poem selection for state and national finals. At the State level, 1) One of the three poems must be pre-20th century and 2) One of the three poems must be under 25 lines in length. One poem may meet both criteria. Either or both criteria may be met in the third poem selected, even though it will be used as a tie breaking poem.** Lists of qualified poems are available on the Poetry Out Loud website. Both requirements are made with anticipation that they will encourage students to look more broadly at the poems available and also to encourage use of classic poems and those that do not require a long, dramatic interpretation. Last year, these requirements helped students stay on an even playing field.

Length of Contest - Large and Small Schools

Classroom contests can be held during class periods. A school's final contest should run less than two hours; any longer than that can be difficult for the audience. Ideally, 6 to 15 students should compete in each school's final contest. If your school has 6 to 15 classes participating in the program, send one winner from each class to the school finals. If fewer than 6 classes are participating, 2 students from each class may advance to the school finals. If more than 15 classes are participating, you might consider holding grade-level competitions first, allowing two or three students from each grade to advance to the school finals. In structuring your contest(s), keep in mind that each recitation takes approximately 3 to 4 minutes. Judges will require another minute to mark scores, yielding a rough average of 4 to 5 minutes per recitation.

Details on Number of Poems at Each Contest Level

As stated above, for the classroom contest, students must prepare at least one poem to recite. Participants in the school finals must prepare two poems for recitation. Students who advance to the state and national levels must have three poems prepared. State and national contestants will recite their poems in rounds, not consecutively, with each student reciting one poem in each round.

Poem Selection and Performance Time

Students must select poems from the official *Poetry Out Loud* print or online anthologies at <http://www.poetryoutloud.org/poems-and-performance/find-poems>. (Not all poems on the audio CD are eligible for recitation in *Poetry Out Loud*.) The maximum recitation time per poem should be about 4 minutes. Students must provide the names of their poems and the order in which they will be recited in advance to the contest coordinator. This will enable the coordinator to have copies of the poems collated for the judges and prompter, and score sheets prepared.

Venue for School, County, State and National Competitions

For the School and County Competitions reserve a school theater, auditorium, or other appropriate venue. The ideal setting will have a stage and theater-style seating. Competitors will stand alone on

stage in front of the audience while reciting their poems. Other competitors may either be seated to the side of the stage or in the front row of the audience. Depending on the size of the venue, amplification may be appropriate.

The State and National Competitions are both held in large theaters. The California State Competition for 2012 will be held in Sacramento, California near the State Capitol. The National Competition will be held in Washington, D.C.

Staffing The Competition

At the School and County Competitions, you will need volunteers to serve in a variety of roles:

COORDINATOR

The Lead Teacher(s) may be best suited for this role. The coordinator will ensure that the event runs smoothly, all volunteers are present, judges are briefed before the event, scoring is accurate, etc.

EMCEE

An emcee will guide the competition from start to finish, providing welcoming remarks, introducing judges and students, and announcing winners. The emcee or the coordinator will need to keep an eye on the judges to make sure they have enough time to complete their scoring before the next student begins their recitation. Since judges may need a minute between recitations to finish scoring and hand in their score sheets, you may want to ask the emcee to entertain the audience or fill that time with biographical information about the poets or competing students (which you would need to have prepared). Another idea would be to have musicians perform briefly between recitations—perhaps student musicians from your school band or orchestra. California State Competitions have had live music, which has enhanced the event dramatically.

JUDGES

The teacher can serve as the sole judge for a classroom contest. At the school finals, 3 to 5 judges should be sufficient—a group of teachers may serve as judges, or you may invite some community members to judge the contest. Appropriate judges might be local poets, actors, professors, arts reporters, politicians, or members of the school board. Judges should have some knowledge of poetry, although they need not be experts.

ACCURACY JUDGE

Assign a separate judge or a diligent student to serve as an Accuracy Judge. The Accuracy Judge should mark missed or incorrect words during the recitation. The teacher or lead judge should decide on a consistent point scale for evaluating accuracy. If a student makes no mistakes and does not need help from the Prompter, the accuracy addition should be the full 8 points. If he or she makes a couple of minor mistakes (i.e., "a" instead of "the") or inverts a pair of words, the accuracy addition should be 7 of the full 8 points. If the student misses lines or stanzas, reverses the order of sections in the poem, etc., add fewer points for accuracy, depending on the severity of the errors. A student's accuracy score should be docked 3 points for each use of the Prompter.

PROMPTER

Even the most experienced actors can forget their lines. It is very helpful to have a teacher or student sit in front of the competitors with copies of the poems to read along with the recitations, ready to prompt a student who may get stuck on a line. Show the students where the Prompter is sitting before the

contest begins, so they know where to look if they get lost during their recitation. If a competitor is stuck for several seconds and looks to the Prompter for help, the Prompter may whisper the first words of the next line to get that student back on track. The Prompter may double as the Accuracy Judge.

SCORE TABULATOR

During the competition, it is helpful if someone inputs the judges' scores in a database totaling scores after the recitations are finished. An Excel spreadsheet works well for this purpose. Tallying the scores by hand will work just fine as well.

Introducing The Poem

At the competition, the emcee should introduce each student as they come to the stage to recite. It is the student's job to identify the poem by announcing both the title and the author. (For example, "'The Lake Isle of Innisfree,' by William Butler Yeats" or "'The New Colossus,' by Emma Lazarus.") The poem must be recited from memory. Recitations should include epigraphs if included in the *Poetry Out Loud* anthology, but a student's own editorial comments before or after the poem are not allowed. Author's dedications and footnoted translations included with the original poem are optional, and their inclusion or exclusion should not weigh in the score.

Scoring

A copy of the *Poetry Out Loud* evaluation score sheet may be downloaded at <http://www.poetryoutloud.org/competition/judge-preparation>. **Print out the score sheets before the school and county contests, and fill in the names of the participants and the titles of the poems they will recite.** Have these in the order of recitation before the competition, with one set for each judge. After each recitation, judges should turn in their completed evaluation sheets to the score tabulator, who will be adding up the scores throughout the competition. The Accuracy Judge can use the separate score sheet found at the same link above. The Accuracy Judge's score will be added to the other judges' scores in the final tabulation.

Awards

We encourage you to solicit prizes from local businesses, if appropriate. Select a school champion as well as a runner-up. The school champion will proceed to the County Competition where a county champion and runner-up will be chosen. The county champion and a parent/guardian will be given a stipend to travel to Sacramento to participate in the California State Competition. We encourage family members and teachers of the county champion as well as the county runners up to attend the State Competition. Please feel free to download and use the award certificate on the POL website.

California POL Poster

Please take photos of the winner and runner up at the county competition and email them immediately. Each year the California Arts Council creates a statewide poster of POL county competition winners and runners-up. In 2012 we need all Counties to send digital headshots of both the county competition winners and runners-up to kmargolis@cac.ca.gov no later than **February 18, 2012**. When taking the photos, please set your digital camera at a high resolution. Check your camera menu or format for high picture quality or resolution. Most digital cameras are set at 72 dpi, and this will not translate well in print materials. The student's photo should be taken indoors away from any walls to avoid shadows. Please take 2 shots of both the winner and runner-up—one close up and one a little further away so we have room to play with the image if needed. Please ask the students to look straight forward into the camera, and take the shots straight in front of the student.

We also ask you to send other photos of the county winners, depicting them in the activities that best describe who they are. These photos may be at the county competition or on the soccer field. We will be using these photos in a slide show at the state competition. We encourage you to be creative!

We will be distributing these posters at the State Competition in Sacramento, in bookstores and libraries throughout the state, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Poetry Foundation, and California Poets in the Schools for display.

Sample Schedule

A typical competition may look something like this, based on 10 students, an average recitation time of 3 minutes each, and 1 minute between recitations for scoring:

1:00 pm - Welcoming remarks and introduction of the judging panel, Prompter, and Accuracy Judge. This is a good time to recognize any sponsors.

1:05 - Review of the evaluation criteria for judging the recitations.

1:10-2:30 - Recitations, taking place in two rounds. In the first round, each student will recite their first poem. In the second round, each student will recite their second poem.

2:40 - Ten-minute intermission for scoring to be completed and winner and runner-up to be determined.

2:50 - Announcement of winner and runner-up. Make presentation of certificates and any prizes.

CALIFORNIA POETRY OUT LOUD 2012 IMPORTANT DATES

Deadline for POL County Partners to submit school lists on excel form http://www.cac.ca.gov/poetryoutloud/2012/resources.php to kmargolis@cac.ca.gov	Thursday, January 5, 2012
Deadline for POL County Competitions Including submission of all forms: Winner/Runner Up & Photo Release Forms http://www.cac.ca.gov/poetryoutloud/2012/resources.php Send to kmargolis@cac.ca.gov	Saturday, February 18, 2012
Deadline for sending digital photos of county winners and runners-up to kmargolis@cac.ca.gov for the statewide poster, website and State Finals program.	Saturday, February 18, 2012
California State Competition in Sacramento, CA.	Sunday, March 25, 2012 & Monday, March 26, 2012
National Finals in Washington DC	May 13, 2012 - May 15, 2012

The California Arts Council is delighted you are interested in participating in this seventh year of California Poetry Out Loud. Make sure you check out the “[Calendar](#) & [Insider](#)” sections of our website for important information and useful tools.

Please do not hesitate to contact Kristin Margolis at kmargolis@cac.ca.gov if you have any questions.