



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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ALABAMA STUDENT RISES TO THE TOP IN NATIONAL POETRY RECITATION COMPETITION

Montgomery, Ala. - Youssef Biaz, a junior at Auburn High School, has returned from Washington DC, where he competed in the Poetry Out Loud Recitation Contest at the national finals. This is the 5th year that Alabama has sent a state champion to the national finals, and the first time an Alabama student progressed from the semi finals in Washington DC to be a national finalist. During the semi finals, he placed in the top nine of 53 total participants, which included champions from each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. In the audience to share his success were his mother, father, two sisters and a cousin who drove all the way to Washington D.C. Also in the audience was Davis Thompson, his English teacher, and coordinator for the program at Auburn High School. And finally Diana Green (Alabama State Council on the Arts) and Donna Russell (Alabama Alliance for Arts Education) were there to cheer him on.

Poetry Out Loud is administrated in Alabama by a partnership between the Alabama State Council on the Arts and the Alabama Alliance for Arts Education. Regional coordinators hold competitions in Mobile, Montgomery, Tuscaloosa and Huntsville, providing an opportunity for any and every high school in the state to participate. Diana Green, Arts in Education Program Manager at the Council comments, "I think each year our state champions get better, because we know more about what is expected, and because we have a lot more schools competing. This was the first year Auburn High School participated and I think they will be back again next year. " Poetry Out Loud is a national program sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Poetry Foundation. It encourages high school students to learn about great poetry through memorization, performance, and competition. Beginning at the classroom level, winners advance to the school-wide competition, to regional competitions, then to the state capital competition, and ultimately to the National Finals in Washington, DC. More than 250,000 students across the country took part in *Poetry Out Loud* this year.

Youssef won \$200 for himself, and \$500 for his school library as the winner of the Alabama State Competition. Because he placed in the top nine at the National Competition, he will receive another \$1000 scholarship, and his school will receive another \$500 for poetry books in the library.

Youssef is multi-talented. He is a star student, sings, dances and acts, and even writes plays. "His father informed me at the end of the evening," says Ms. Green about the culminating event, "Did you know Youssef is also a finalist in the Southern Writers' Project?" He has written a play that takes place in Morocco and it is under review at the Shakespeare Festival. We may know the results of that competition soon.

For more information about Poetry Out Loud in Alabama, contact Diana Green at 334-242-4076 Ext. 241 or diana.green@arts.alabama.gov

About the National Endowment for the Arts

This year, the National Endowment for the Arts marks its 40th anniversary of leadership in the arts. The NEA is a public agency dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts – both new and established – bringing the arts to all Americans, and providing leadership in arts education. Established by Congress in 1965 as an independent agency of the federal government, the Arts Endowment is the largest national funder of the arts, bringing great art to all 50 states, including rural areas, inner cities, and military bases.

About the Poetry Foundation

The Poetry Foundation, publisher of *Poetry* magazine, is committed to a vigorous presence for poetry in our culture. One of the largest literary organizations in the world, it exists to discover and celebrate the best poetry and to place it before the largest possible audience. The Poetry Foundation seeks to be a leader in shaping a receptive climate for poetry by developing new audiences, creating new avenues for delivery, and encouraging new kinds of poetry through innovative literary prizes and programs. In addition to launching a major new poetry Web site, the Poetry Foundation recently conducted the first-ever study designed to find out where poetry stands in American culture. For more information, please visit PoetryFoundation.org.

About Alabama State Council on the Arts

The mission of the Alabama State Council on the Arts is to promote Alabama's diverse and rich artistic resources while highlighting excellence and educational experiences. The Council is the official agency for the support and development of the arts in Alabama. It was established in 1966 by an act of the Alabama Legislature. The goal of the Arts in Education program is to provide opportunities for Alabama students to learn in, through and about the arts, ensuring arts as an integral and essential component of education in the State of Alabama.

About the Alabama Alliance for Arts Education

The Alabama Alliance for Arts Education is a member of the Kennedy Center Alliance for Arts Education Network. The Alliance recognizes that the arts express the essence of civilization and nurture the highest aspirations of the human spirit and are therefore dedicated to support policies, practices, and partnerships that ensure the arts are woven into the very fabric of the lives of Alabama's children.

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