

Poetry Out Loud Frequently Asked Questions



What is Poetry Out Loud?

A partnership of the National Endowment for the Arts, Poetry Foundation, and the state and jurisdictional arts agencies, Poetry Out Loud is a national arts education program that encourages the study of great poetry by offering free educational materials and a dynamic recitation competition to high schools across the country. Schools that choose to participate in Poetry Out Loud start the program in the classroom, where teachers may use the Poetry Out Loud toolkit to teach poetry recitation and run classroom competitions. Students select, memorize, and recite poems from an anthology of more than 1,100 classic and contemporary poems. Beginning at the classroom level, winners will advance to the school-wide competition, then to the state competition, and ultimately to the national finals in Washington, DC. Since the program began in 2005, more than 3.8 million students and 60,000 teachers from 16,000 schools across the country have participated in Poetry Out Loud.

Where and when will Poetry Out Loud take place?

Poetry Out Loud takes place in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. High schools that choose to participate in the official competition conduct their classroom and school-level programs and contests between September 2020 and February 2021. State contests will be held by early March 2021. The national finals will take place in April in Washington, D.C.

Who can participate in the official Poetry Out Loud contest?

The official Poetry Out Loud contest is administered at the state level by state and jurisdictional arts agencies in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. All types of high schools are welcome to participate, including public, private, parochial, independent, charter, etc. Organizations serving youth are also eligible. Only schools/organizations registered with their state Poetry Out Loud coordinator are eligible for the competition.

Only currently enrolled students in grades 9–12 are eligible, with an exception made for

8th-grade students participating in a 9th- through 12th-grade class. A Poetry Out Loud National Champion is not eligible to compete in future years.

No student may be excluded from participating in Poetry Out Loud on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, disability or national origin. More information on Poetry Out Loud rules and eligibility may be found at poetryoutloud.org.

Are schools that are not part of the official contest welcome to participate in other ways?

All of the Poetry Out Loud program materials are available for free online in the [Teachers & Organizers](#) section of the website. Using these online materials, schools are welcome to conduct their own “unofficial” poetry recitation competitions and introduce their students to classic and contemporary poetry.

Are program materials available?

Poetry Out Loud offers educators free standards-based curriculum materials, which include an online poetry anthology with more than 1,100 classic and contemporary poems, a teacher’s guide, lesson plans, and video and audio on the art of recitation. These free resources are available at poetryoutloud.org.

What are the prizes?

National Level: A total of \$50,000 in awards and school stipends will be given at the Poetry Out Loud National Finals, including a \$20,000 award for the National Champion, \$10,000 for 2nd place, \$5,000 for 3rd place, and \$1,000 for 4th-9th places. The schools of each of the top 9 finalists receive \$500 for the purchase of poetry materials. There will be one honorable mention in each of three national semifinals competitions. Those students will not advance to the finals, but will each receive a \$1,000 cash award and a \$500 school stipend.

Each winner at the state level receives \$200 and an all-expenses-paid trip with an adult chaperone to Washington, DC* to compete for the national championship. The state winner’s school receives \$500 for the purchase of poetry materials. The first runner-up in each state receives \$100, with \$200 for their school. At the national finals, a total of \$50,000 in awards and school stipends is awarded annually.

The Poetry Foundation provides and administers all aspects of the monetary prizes awarded and travel arrangements to the Poetry Out Loud National Finals. Awards are made in the form of lump sum cash payouts, reportable to the IRS. Tax liabilities are the sole responsibility of the winners and their families. Full details on prize requirements and travel and accommodations requirements are available in the [rules and eligibility](#)

section of the website.

What are the judging criteria?

All contestants are evaluated on these criteria: physical presence, voice and articulation, evidence of understanding, dramatic appropriateness, accuracy, and overall performance. For more information regarding these criteria, please consult the [teacher's guide](#).

How can I get more information?

Visit poetryoutloud.org for more information on this program. The website features educational resources for teachers and students, including standards-based educational materials, tips on hosting a contest, and videos of outstanding performances.