



Michigan Humanities Council

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SARAH HARRIS OF HOLT H.S. WINS *Poetry Out Loud* STATE CHAMPIONSHIP

Sarah to receive \$200 and advance to national finals; Michael Rux of Ionia H.S. takes 2nd place

(LANSING)-----Sarah Harris of Holt High School won the 2007 *Poetry Out Loud* state championship hosted today in Lansing by the Michigan Humanities Council. Harris bested eight other contestants from across Michigan to win the title. Sarah will receive a \$200 cash award and an all-expenses paid trip to the national finals in Washington D.C. from April 30 - May 1, 2007. Holt High School will also receive a \$500 stipend for the purchase of poetry books. Michael Rux of Ionia High School was named the runner-up in the competition. He will receive \$100, along with \$200 for the Ionia High School library. The competition was held at the Michigan Historical Center in Lansing.

Each student recited three poems as part of the competition, and four judges graded each recitation based on five categories: Physical Presence and Posture; Voice Projection and Articulation; Appropriateness of Dramatization; Level of Difficulty; Evidence of Understanding; and, Overall Performance.

Sarah's three poems she recited were: *The Cremation of Sam McGee*, by Robert Service; *Mrs. Krikorian* by Sharon Olds; and, *The Weary Blues*, by Langston Hughes.

The students competing on Saturday were:

- Natosha Huffman, Alba Public Schools
- Nico Watson, Beacon Day Treatment Program (Inkster)
- Hope Jacques, Bullock Creek High School (Midland)
- Candace Filonczek, Dansville High School
- Sarah Harris, Holt High School
- Kristin Peterson, Houghton High School
- Michael Rux, Ionia High School
- Kayleena Heslip, Owosso Christian School; and,
- Jacquelyn Del Valle, Sexton High School (Lansing).

The *Poetry Out Loud* program, a Michigan Humanities Council partnership program with the National Endowment for the Arts, The Poetry Foundation, Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs, and the Library of Michigan, encourages high school students to learn about great poetry

through memorization, performance, and competition. Since November, Language Arts/English teachers spent at least two or three weeks of class time to prepare students for each school competition. Each school champion advanced to the state competition held earlier today.

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Page 2. Press Release: March 10, 2007. Sarah Harris of Holt H.S. Wins *Poetry Out Loud* State Championship

Sarah will compete at the National Finals, to be held on April 30 - May 1, 2007, in Washington, D.C. Scholarships and school stipends totaling \$50,000 will be awarded at the National Finals, with a \$20,000 college scholarship for the *Poetry Out Loud* national champion.

Notably, Sarah is the second Holt High School student to be named Michigan's *Poetry Out Loud* champion. Travis Walter from Holt High School was Michigan's 2006 *Poetry Out Loud* champion. Margaret Charette, Holt's language arts teacher, said, "I would like to thank you for your efforts in providing my students and Holt Public Schools with the extraordinary opportunity to participate in Poetry Out Loud. The lessons and competitions connected with Poetry Out Loud have fostered an interest in poetry that I have not witnessed before in my 16 years of teaching."

Poetry Out Loud builds on the resurgence of poetry as an oral art form as seen in the slam poetry movement and the immense popularity of rap music among youth. Through this program, students master public speaking skills, build self-confidence, and learn about their literary heritage.

The Michigan Humanities Council, founded in 1974, is the state's independent, non-profit affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. For additional information on the Michigan Humanities Council, please visit: www.michiganhumanities.org or call 517-372-7770.

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FACTS AND FIGURES FROM 2005-2006 MICHIGAN'S POETRY OUT LOUD

Participation:

- 481 students participated in Michigan
- 5 high schools participated: Bullock Creek HS (Midland), Sexton HS (Lansing), Holt HS, Owosso Christian HS, Dondero HS (Royal Oak)
- 15 teachers participated in *Poetry Out Loud*
- Teachers provided 174.5 hours of their time in addition to 103.5 hours of classroom time
- Over \$100,000 in prizes were awarded to students and schools at state and national levels

Students who returned evaluations reported the following about *Poetry Out Loud*:

- 86% understood poetry can be a powerful tool to express one's personal feelings and view of the world
- 75% saw a connection between poetry and today's culture
- 75% understood that reading poetry is like acting
- 54% identified the elements and reasoning behind poetry
- 42% understood that various poetic forms support different modes of artistic expression

