

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS
and
THE POETRY FOUNDATION
present

NATIONAL
POETRY
RECITATION
CONTEST



Program Guide



Arnold Cummings
Dickinson
Eliot
Browning
Dunbar
Shelley
Keats
Thomas
Auden
Donne
Hughes

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Letters of Welcome

Photo by Vance Jacobs



THE MEMORIZATION and recitation of poetry have been central elements of education since ancient times. By studying and reciting poetry, students learn to master language as well as develop skills in public speaking. This practice also helps build a student's self-confidence and expand his or her knowledge of great literature.

Poetry recitation as a competitive event is as old as the Olympic Games. Along with wrestling, long-distance running, and the javelin toss, the ancient Olympics included contests in music and poetry. Performers trained for years and traveled great distances to the games. Now, more than two thousand years since the Olympics began—and after a few silent decades—the recitation contest returns.

Learning great poetry by heart develops the mind and the imagination. By encouraging your students to study, memorize, and perform some of the most influential and timeless poems of the English language, you will be immersing them in powerful language and provocative ideas.

Learning to recite poetry also invites personal growth. Although many students may initially be nervous about reciting in front of their peers, the experience will prove valuable—not only in school but also in life. Much of the future success of students will depend on how well they present themselves in public. Whether talking to one person or many, public speaking is a skill people use every day in both the workplace and the community.

To recognize excellence, the National Endowment for the Arts and The Poetry Foundation will provide winning students with honors ranging from official award certificates to a \$1,000 cash prize.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dana Gioia". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Dana Gioia
Chairman
National Endowment for the Arts

CAN THERE BE any subject more difficult to teach in the classroom than poetry? Students who take their culture at the speed of the Internet may not accept a measured, majestic poem that comes down to us from the past. But a great poem has much to tell if we can find a way to listen. It will speak to us and for us, giving voice to times of great joy or great loss. As we grow older it will grow with us, waiting to give new meaning to our deepening experience. “Why should I study this poem,” the Internet-savvy student may ask, “let alone try to learn it by heart?” And we may answer, “Because it is a chance to make a friend for life.”

The National Poetry Recitation Contest brings new energy to an ancient art by returning it to the classrooms of America. The public recitation of great poetry is a way to honor the speaker, the poem, and the audience all at once. Hearing a poem spoken aloud, we discover that a poem is before anything else an event of the ear. In the hands of the poet our everyday speech becomes a musical instrument. The meaning of the poem, we find, lies as much in the sound of its words as in their sense.

Hearing the spoken words of the ancient poets, we learn that we are not alone, that men and women always have felt as we feel, that the human spirit has been the unchanging constant in the history of our kind. Hearing the voices of our contemporary poets, we learn again that we are not alone, that in our individuality we are a community. The Poetry Foundation is excited to join with the National Endowment for the Arts in the National Poetry Recitation Contest.



John Barr
President
The Poetry Foundation



Photo courtesy of The Poetry Foundation



The National Endowment for the Arts is the largest annual funder of the arts in the United States. An independent federal agency, the NEA is the official arts organization of the United States government, dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts—both new and established—bringing the arts to all Americans, and providing leadership in arts education.



The Poetry Foundation is an independent literary organization committed to a vigorous presence for poetry in our culture. The Foundation publishes *Poetry* magazine, sponsors a variety of public programs, and supports creative projects in literature.



Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation celebrates, promotes, and supports the richness and diversity of the region's arts resources and works to increase access to the arts and cultures of the region and the world.

Additional copies of this publication can be ordered on the NEA Web site at www.arts.gov.

This publication is published by:
National Endowment for the Arts
1100 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20506-0001
(202) 682-5400



Voice/TTY:
(202) 682-5496
For individuals who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.



Individuals who do not use conventional print may contact the Arts Endowment's Office for AccessAbility to obtain this publication in an alternate format. Telephone: (202) 682-5532

Design by Fletcher Design, Inc./Washington, D.C.



This publication was printed on recycled paper.

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What happens to a dream deferred?

*Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?*



LANGSTON HUGHES (1902–1967)

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The National Endowment for the Arts, in partnership with The Poetry Foundation, has created this curriculum for the National Poetry Recitation Contest. The contest will follow a traditional pyramid structure.

Beginning at the classroom level, winners from each class will advance to the school-wide competition and will be sent an official award certificate by the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts. If fewer than six classes are participating in your school, two students from each class will advance to the school-wide level. If six or more classes are participating, only one student from each class will advance.

The participating teachers in your school should coordinate the school-wide competition. Ideally, the competition should be held as a full-school assembly, so even the students who do not participate will have a chance to hear the recitation of great poetry. One winner from each school will be selected to advance to the Regional Recitation Finals. Those students will be given a special plaque. (Washington-area students who advance to the Finals will also receive a pair of season tickets to the Folger Poetry Series.)

One winner and two runners-up will be selected in each region. The grand-prize winner will receive a \$1,000 cash award, and the two runners-up will each receive \$500. The winning student's school will receive a \$2,000 stipend for the purchase of poetry books, and the schools of the runners-up will each receive \$1,000 for poetry books.

The schedule and curriculum for the National Poetry Recitation Contest have been intentionally designed not to pre-empt other classroom activities and curricula. After the initial instruction, teachers should be able to continue with other lessons while dedicating a portion of each class to preparation for the contest.

Note: The above prizes are offered for the pilot programs in the Washington, DC, and Chicago areas in the spring of 2005. The prizes do not apply to other pilot programs.

*My candle burns at both ends;
It will not last the night;
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends—
It gives a lovely light.*



EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY (1892–1950)

PREPARATION

Read the poems. The students should have their own copies of the contest anthologies. Either as homework or a classroom activity, have the students spend time reading through the anthologies in search of poems they will memorize.

Ask each student to choose a poem to memorize. At the classroom level, each student must choose one poem of ten or more lines to memorize and prepare for recitation. Each student should choose a poem with which he or she feels a personal connection.

Discuss the poems. Understanding the text is the most important preparation for reading poetry aloud. If the performer doesn't understand the text, neither will the audience. Begin preparation with a class session of discussions concerning the students' selected poems. (Dictionaries may be necessary for this activity.) Depending on class size, it might be wise to divide the students into groups of six to eight for the discussions and text analyses.

Have students memorize the poems. Share these memorization tips with your students:

1. Rewrite your poem by hand several times. Each time, try to write more and more of it from memory.
2. Read your poem aloud before going to sleep at night, and repeat it when you wake up.
3. Carry around a copy of your poem in your pocket or bag. You'll find many moments throughout the day to reread or recite it.
4. Practice your poem by saying it to family and friends. Make sure to give them a copy so they can prompt you if you miss a line or word.

Model recitation skills. The teacher should model both effective and ineffective recitation practices, asking students to point out which elements of the performance are successful and which are not. On the board, develop a list of bad habits that distract the audience or take away from the performance, such as fidgeting, monotone voice, inaudible volume, mispronunciations, and (the most common problem) speaking too quickly. Now develop a list of elements that a successful recitation performance should contain: eye contact with audience, voice inflection, sufficient volume, evidence of understanding, pronunciation, and an appropriate speed with the proper pauses.

Practice the poems. Allow class-time for students to practice their poems. Break the class into pairs of students (rotating at each session). Have each student practice with his or her partner. Partners should offer constructive criticism, using the checklist on page seven for their critique.

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*



ROBERT FROST (1874–1963)

SUGGESTED CLASS SCHEDULE

WEEK 1

- Read and discuss the poems in class.
(2-3 full classes)
- Have students choose poems to memorize. They should look up all unfamiliar words in the dictionary, making sure they understand and can pronounce every word and phrase.
- Encourage students to make helpful notes onto the copies of their poems.
(1 full class)
- The teacher should model effective and ineffective recitation practices.
(1 full class)
- Have students practice their poems with partners.
(15 minutes per day)

WEEK 2

- Have students continue to practice their poems with different partners each day. They should also work on their memorization and performance outside of school. By the end of the week, students should have their poems completely memorized and be able to recite them without help.
(15 minutes per day)
- Hold the classroom recitation contest at the end of the week.
(1-2 full classes)

WEEK 3

- Winners of the classroom contests will prepare an additional poem for recitation, and will perform both poems in the school-wide competition at the end of the week. This preparation can be done outside of classroom time, under the teachers' guidance.

*Because I could not stop for Death,
He kindly stopped for me;
The carriage held but just ourselves
And Immortality.*



EMILY DICKINSON (1830–1886)

PRACTICE CHECKLIST

- Volume** Speak loudly enough to be heard by the entire audience.
- Speed** Speak at a natural pace. Most of us speak too quickly when we are nervous, which can make a performance difficult to understand. Speak slowly, but not so slowly that the language sounds unnatural or awkward.
- Voice Inflection** Avoid monotone recitation. If you sound bored, you will project that boredom onto the audience. You should also avoid using too much inflection, which can make the recitation sound insincere.
- Posture and Presence** Stand up straight and attentively. Appropriate gestures and movements on the stage are encouraged, as long as they are not overdone.
- Evidence of Understanding and Pronunciation** Be sure you know the meaning and correct pronunciation of every word and line in your poem. If you are unsure about something, it will be apparent to the audience. Don't hesitate to ask your teacher for help.
- Eye Contact** Engage your audience. Look them in the eye. If you have trouble with that, look past them to the far wall, but try not to look down.

Student Name: _____

	poor	>	average	>	excellent
Volume	1	2	3	4	5
Speed	1	2	3	4	5
Voice Inflection	1	2	3	4	5
Posture and Presence	1	2	3	4	5
Evidence of Understanding	1	2	3	4	5
Pronunciation	1	2	3	4	5
Eye Contact	1	2	3	4	5
Accuracy	1	2	3	4	5

Photocopy as needed.

*Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*



DYLAN THOMAS (1914–1953)

CONTEST GUIDELINES

At the competition, students should stand before the class (or the school), introduce themselves, and identify what they will perform. They should announce both the title and the author of the poem they are about to recite. (They should say, for example, “This is ‘The Lake Isle of Innisfree,’ by William Butler Yeats,” or “I will be reciting ‘The New Colossus,’ by Emma Lazarus.”) As noted earlier, the poem must be recited from memory.

Students who compete at the school-wide level will select two poems to recite. Students who advance to the regional level will need to have three poems prepared for recitation.

The teacher will act as the judge using the following evaluation sheet. Select three to five teachers to judge the school-wide competition. Each judge should have a copy of the anthology in order to check the accuracy of the recitations. Add the scores from the judges to evaluate each performer.

*I'll bear your censure as your praise,
For never shall the clan
Confine my singing to its ways
Beyond the ways of man.*



COUNTEE CULLEN (1903–1946)

CONTEST EVALUATION SHEET

Name of Performer: _____

Poem: _____

Ratings

1: Poor

2: Below Average

3: Average

4: Very Good

5: Excellent

	poor	>	average	>	excellent
Volume	1	2	3	4	5
Speed	1	2	3	4	5
Voice Inflection	1	2	3	4	5
Posture and Presence	1	2	3	4	5
Evidence of Understanding	1	2	3	4	5
Pronunciation	1	2	3	4	5
Eye Contact	1	2	3	4	5
Accuracy	1	2	3	4	5

Final Score: _____

Photocopy as needed.

*We must uncenter our minds from ourselves;
We must unhumanize our views a little, and become confident
As the rock and ocean that we were made from.*



ROBINSON JEFFERS (1887–1962)

WINNERS LIST

Names of Winners: _____

Classroom winners

School-wide winners

School: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Number of Participating Students: _____

Name of Teacher: _____

Signature of Teacher: _____

Please return this form to:

Recitation Awards
The National Endowment for the Arts
1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 621
Washington, DC 20506

NCTE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS

National Poetry Recitation Contest fulfills these standards: 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 11, 12.

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
9. Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.
10. Students whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop competency in the English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum.
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).



Shakespeare
Blake
Wordsworth Poe
Harper Millay
Pound
Wheatley Moore
Cullen Frost
Whitman
Tennyson Lowell

A Great Nation Deserves Great Art.

