



WASHINGTON STATE
ARTS COMMISSION

NEWS RELEASE

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Spokane student takes top honors in national Poetry Out Loud competition

Olympia—Langston Ward, a high school senior from Spokane, has taken top honors in the national Poetry Out Loud Recitation Contest in Washington DC. Ward, a senior at Mead High School, competed against 52 other semi-finalists from all over the U.S. to earn the high score in last night's contest.

Contestants recited poetry that they had memorized. A panel of judges scored each student based on dramatic appropriateness, evidence of understanding, physical presence, voice and articulation, level of difficulty, accuracy, and overall performance. Ward's final poem performed, "The Bad Old Days," by Kenneth Rexroth, sealed his win.

"Langston's honors are well-deserved," said Lisa Jaret, who manages the Poetry Out Loud program for the Washington State Arts Commission, also known as ArtsWA. "It takes a great deal of work to prepare for this level of competition, and it was exciting to see how well he was able to communicate meaning to an audience – a skill that I know will serve him well in the future."



The Poetry Out Loud National Finals is the culmination of a pyramid-structure competition that began last September. The nationwide poetry education program and competition involved more than 375,000 students and some 2,000 high schools across the country. Poetry Out Loud is sponsored by the National Arts Endowment and the Poetry Foundation and is supported and managed in Washington state by ArtsWA.

As national champion, Ward will receive a \$20,000 award, and his high school will receive a \$500 stipend to buy poetry books. This is the second year that Ward achieved national recognition for his skill in performing poetry. Last year, as Washington state's champion, he finished among the top nine competitors nationwide.

Ward says that it is the inspiration of poetry that has propelled him to excel in memorizing and performing it. But this has not always been the case. "Before Poetry Out Loud, I didn't have an interest in poetry," he said. "Now I'm in it for life." Poetry Out Loud is a school-based program, and schools must register to participate. Teachers have access to a variety of support materials and workshops to help students develop their recitations.

“Poetry Out Loud has been an important part of our Arts in Education program since the first competition, in 2006, and the results have proven the value of poetry recitation in the lives of participating students,” said Kris Tucker, Executive Director of ArtsWA. “We’re thrilled about Langston’s achievement, and the fact that he and thousands of other youth have come to love the art of poetry.”

For more information about Poetry Out Loud in Washington state and to view videos of students performing at the Poetry Out Loud state competition, visit the ArtsWA website, at www.arts.wa.gov.

PHOTO CAPTION: Poetry Out Loud National Champion and Washington State Champion Langston Ward recites during the competition. Photo by James Kegley, courtesy National Endowment for the Arts.

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National Endowment for the Arts news release: <http://www.arts.gov/news/news13/2013-POL-FInals-Winners.html>