

POETRY OUT LOUD®



2023
2024



A Guide for Teachers and Organizers

A partnership of National Endowment for
the Arts and Poetry Foundation

*The 2023 Poetry Out Loud
National Finalists gathered in
Washington, DC, in May 2023.*



“ I love the fact that students are not just reading a poem or reading words, but they are actually sharing a part of their identity, sharing what’s important to them. The poems that I chose share a different facet of what I believe in, who I am.”

— Sreepadaarchana Munjuluri, 2023 Poetry Out Loud National Champion and Indiana State Champion

Contents

3	▶ Why Poetry Out Loud?
4	▶ How Do We Get Involved?
5	▶ Contest Structure
6	▶ Getting Started*
7	▶ Sample Schedule
8	▶ The Contest
10	▶ Judging
12	▶ Evaluation Criteria and Tips for Contestants
17	▶ Publicity Tips
18	▶ Contest Evaluation Sheet
19	▶ Accuracy Score Sheet
20	▶ Rules
22	▶ NCTE English Language Arts Standards
23	▶ Common Core and National Core Arts Standards

*Lesson plans are available at PoetryOutLoud.org.

NOTE: This guide includes information on how to hold in-person Poetry Out Loud events. For information on how to run Poetry Out Loud virtually, please visit PoetryOutLoud.org.

"I can tell a difference in how I've grown in public speaking. I feel more comfortable on stage and my appreciation for poetry has definitely grown."

—Victoria Laine Jelks, 2023 Kansas State Champion



"What I've loved about Poetry Out Loud is how exciting it is. It has surprised me how easily I've been able to make so many friends, which is different from most competitions."

—Mariam Botana de Armas, 2023 Texas State Champion



"I have enjoyed seeing all the forms of literature coming to life in Poetry Out Loud. Seeing how everyone can express and convey their emotions through these poems really has brought new ideas to my mind."

—Maiss Hussein, 2023 Delaware State Champion

"There are always more layers found in my Poetry Out Loud poems as I spend more time with them, and they continue to surprise me with persisting provisions of discovery."

—Alex Yue, 2023 California State Champion



Why Poetry Out Loud?

Poetry Out Loud is a fun and dynamic way to introduce students to poetry.

- Poetry Out Loud builds self-confidence and helps develop social and emotional maturity.
- The thrill of competition encourages students to do their best and support their peers.
- Poetry Out Loud creates lifelong lovers of poetry and creative writing.
- Poetry Out Loud offers an opportunity for all types of students to succeed.

Poetry Out Loud is easy to implement.

- Poetry Out Loud materials are completely free.
- All types of high schools are welcome to participate as well as homeschool students. Non-school organizations, such as after school clubs, libraries, or nonprofit organizations may choose to run Poetry Out Loud as well.
- The program is flexible, can be folded into an existing curriculum, and meets NCTE, Common Core, and National Core Arts Standards.
- This guide and online supplemental materials contain everything you need to teach the program successfully and conduct a contest—whether in-person or virtually.

Poetry Out Loud inspires learning.

- Students improve their analytical skills through reading and interpreting a variety of poems.
- Poetry Out Loud fosters confidence in students' own writing.
- Students learn about literary history and contemporary life.
- Poetry Out Loud can forge stronger connections between teachers and students.
- Poetry Out Loud promotes creativity and success in other disciplines.

*2023 Poetry Out Loud
Second Place National
Winner and Mississippi
State Champion
Edward Wilson Jr.*



How Do We Get Involved?

1.

To register for Poetry Out Loud, get in touch with your state coordinator by visiting the “State Contacts” section of PoetryOutLoud.org.

2.

Once you’ve registered, invite others at your school or organization to participate and plan to host a competition.

3.

Create a simple timeline that outlines your Poetry Out Loud program, including deadlines and competition dates, and then get started!

How do we bring Poetry Out Loud to students?

Poetry Out Loud is flexible and can be implemented in a variety of ways at schools or area organizations.

Here are a few examples:

- Poetry Out Loud is mandatory for all ninth-grade students at a school. Classroom contests are conducted and a schoolwide contest is held at an assembly.
- Three teachers at a school bring Poetry Out Loud to their English classes. They hold individual classroom contests and then hold a schoolwide contest to determine their school winner.
- One teacher makes Poetry Out Loud optional to all their drama students to receive extra credit. This winner moves on to the next level of competition.
- A teacher, librarian, parent volunteer, or a group of students lead an after-school Poetry Out Loud club and hold a contest amongst the participating students.
- A school partners with a library or arts organization to run Poetry Out Loud at their school, either in classrooms or as an extracurricular program.
- An arts organization recruits students in the local area whose schools are not participating in Poetry Out Loud. The organization runs a competition and the winner proceeds to the next level of competition.
- A homeschool organization partners with a teaching artist to administer Poetry Out Loud for their students.

Contest Structure

Poetry Out Loud begins at the classroom/school or at the local level with an area organization. Winners then may advance to a regional and/or state competition, and ultimately to the National Finals. Awards and placements are determined solely by the judges' scores based on the Poetry Out Loud Evaluation Criteria (pages 12-15).



State Awards: Each winner at the state level will receive \$200 and an all-expenses-paid trip (with an adult chaperone) to Washington, DC, to compete at the National Finals. The state winner's representing school or organization will receive \$500 for poetry materials. One runner-up in each state will receive \$100; their school/organization will receive \$200 for the purchase of poetry materials.



National Awards: A total of \$50,000 in awards and school or organizational stipends will be given at the Poetry Out Loud National Finals, including a \$20,000 award for the National Champion.

Awards are offered for the official contests conducted by the state arts agencies, the Poetry Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. The awards do not apply to unofficial contests. Awards will be 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. The Poetry Foundation provides and administers all aspects of the monetary prizes awarded in Poetry Out Loud as well as all travel for state champions to the National Finals.

Getting Started

1. EXPLORE

Have students browse the poems. PoetryOutLoud.org has an online anthology of more than 1,200 poems. Allow time for the students to explore the selections. Students may choose to browse by poem, poet, or thematic collection.

Begin with a poem a day. Help students discover new poets by reading a poem. PoetryOutLoud.org has a poet of the day feature, including poems and poet biographies.

2. UNDERSTAND

Ask each student to select poems to memorize. Allowing students to choose poems that resonate with them is key to helping them recite more effectively. The process of memorizing and performing helps students internalize the author's message and explore complex language and ideas. Find student videos about the selection and memorization of poems at PoetryOutLoud.org.

Discuss the poems. Understanding the text is the most important preparation for reciting poetry. If a student doesn't understand the text, neither will the audience.

Have students memorize the poems. Share these memorization tips:

- Rewrite your poem by hand several times. Each time, try to write more and more of it from memory.
- Read your poem before going to sleep at night, and repeat it when you wake up.
- Carry around a copy of your poem in your pocket or bag and find several moments throughout the day to reread or recite it.
- Practice reciting your poem for family and friends.

3. RECITE

Model recitation skills.

- Recite poems yourself — this is a powerful way to show students it can be done.
- With the class, develop a list of bad habits that take away from the performance, such as insufficient projection, speaking too quickly or too slowly, monotone voice, fidgeting, excessive body language, and mispronunciations.
- Then develop a list of elements of a successful recitation, such as sufficient projection, good pacing with proper pauses, voice inflection, evidence of understanding, correct pronunciation, and composure.

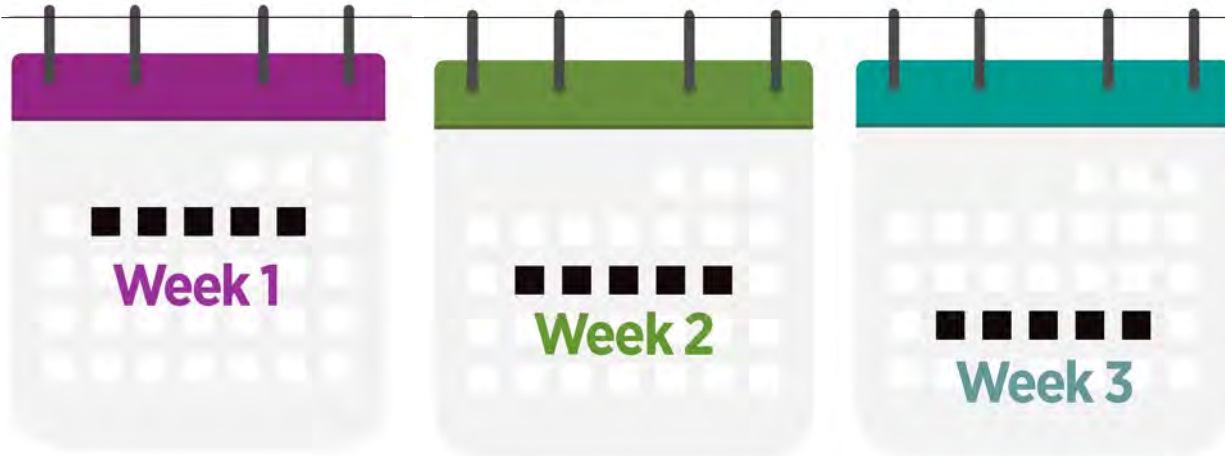
- Play portions of the audio and the video examples at PoetryOutLoud.org and our YouTube channel.
- Allow class time for students to practice their poems. Peers can offer constructive feedback, using the contest evaluation sheet and evaluation criteria as a guide.

4. WRITE

Include creative writing exercises. Creative writing is a natural complement to Poetry Out Loud. There are a number of optional writing exercises and lesson plans at PoetryOutLoud.org.

Note: Please let students know that they can request accommodations for a disability. Teachers and organizers may refer to the Accessibility page on PoetryOutLoud.org for more information or contact their state coordinator for further assistance.

Sample Schedule



Students explore the anthology and choose poems to memorize.

Read and discuss some of the poems as a group.

Model effective and ineffective recitation practices.

Have students practice their poems with different partners each day.

Students should have their poems completely memorized by the end of the week.

Hold practice contests.

Break up the students into groups. Have one student at a time perform for the rest of the group, who act as judges. Encourage discussion about how the student interpreted and presented the poem.

Implement the lesson plans and writing exercises.

Teachers and organizers may offer a more complete poetry unit by using the lesson plans provided at PoetryOutLoud.org.

Hold the contest at the end of the week.

Keep in mind that it takes an average of three or four minutes to recite a poem and judge the recitation. Organizers should structure the contest in a way that best fits their schedules.

Hold the schoolwide recitation contest, if applicable, at the end of the week.

Winners of the classroom contests will prepare two or three poems for recitation and will compete in the schoolwide competition at the end of this week. Ideally, the schoolwide competition will take place at a public venue, whether in-person or online, thus enhancing the entire student body's exposure to poetry and giving the contestants a larger audience.

The Contest

A Poetry Out Loud contest may be conducted in-person or virtually. For more guidance on how to conduct a virtual contest, please visit PoetryOutLoud.org.

Lead Organizer(s)

We recommend that each school or organization identify one or two leaders to serve as the Poetry Out Loud coordinators. Lead organizers will recruit needed participants and staff, distribute materials, organize events, and keep in touch with the state Poetry Out Loud coordinator.

Contest Rounds

State and national finals consist of three rounds of competition. Competitions at lower levels may have fewer rounds, but students must recite only one poem in each round. For instance, we recommend classroom and smaller organization contests have students recite at least one poem; for schoolwide and larger organization contests, we recommend students recite at least two poems.

Poem Selection

Eligible poems are available at PoetryOutLoud.org.

Students must provide the titles and authors of their poems and the order in which they will be recited in advance to the contest coordinator. Students may not change their poem selections or order once they have been submitted.

Introducing and Reciting the Poem

Competitors will recite each poem once individually. The emcee should introduce students as they come to the stage to recite. It is the student's job to identify the poem by accurately announcing both the title and the author, and, if necessary, the translator. (For example, "Pineapple" by Ishwar Gupta, translated by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra.)

- A student's own editorial comments before or after the poem are not allowed.
- Once a student begins their recitation, they should not start over.
- Epigraphs included with the poem in the Poetry Out Loud anthology should be recited, and their omission will affect the accuracy score.
- Footnotes included with the poem in the Poetry Out Loud anthology should not be recited, and their inclusion will affect the accuracy score.
- Stanza numbers and dedications included with the original poem are optional, and their inclusion or omission should not affect the accuracy score.
- Students must include the name of the translator, if applicable.
- The poem must be delivered from memory.

Contest Venue

Classroom contests can be held during class periods; organization contests can be held during a regular meeting time with students. Reserve a school theater, auditorium, or other appropriate venue for a schoolwide competition. The ideal setting will have a stage and theater-style seating. Depending on the size of the venue, amplification may be appropriate.

Staffing the Competition

At the schoolwide or larger organization competition, you will need volunteers to serve in a variety of roles:

Coordinator (1 or 2)

The lead organizers(s) may be best suited for this role. The coordinator will ensure that the event runs smoothly, all volunteers are present, judges are briefed before the event, and scoring is accurate.

Emcee (1)

An emcee will guide the competition from start to finish, providing welcoming remarks, introducing judges and students, and announcing winners.

Judges (3-5), accuracy judge (1)

See page 10 of this guide for advice on selecting and preparing judges.

“When it came to choosing my poems, the thing that I mainly looked for was poems that resonated with where I’m from. I’m from the Flathead Indian Reservation. I hope that this [experience] will be me representing other people like myself.”

—Wica-ta-wi Hoksina Brown, 2023 Montana State Champion

Prompter (1)

It is important to have someone following along with the recitations, ready to prompt a student who may get stuck on a line. Prepare a notebook or PDF with a large-font copy of each poem, in the order of recitation, for the prompter. Seat the prompter in the center of the front row, and have them follow along with the text as each student recites. Show the students where the prompter is sitting before the contest begins so they know where to look if they get lost during their recitation. If a competitor is stuck for several seconds and looks to the prompter for help, the prompter may provide the next few words of the poem to get that student back on track.

Score tabulator (1-2)

While the competition is taking place, someone should input the judges’ scores in a database so that no time is wasted totaling scores after the recitations are finished. An Excel spreadsheet works well for this purpose. A template is available at PoetryOutLoud.org. It may be helpful for the tabulator to have an assistant collect the contest evaluation sheets. Remember to test your tabulation system before the event.

For accessibility requests for students, judges, or the public, please refer to the Accessibility page on PoetryOutLoud.org. For further assistance or questions, please contact your state coordinator.



“Poetry Out Loud feels, to me, like much more than a competition. I will always be grateful for the connections and the personal growth that I’ve garnered throughout this process.”

—Abby Sullivan, 2023 North Carolina State Champion

Judging

Local Levels

For a classroom or small organization-level contest, the teacher or lead organizer can serve as the sole judge.

For a school-level contest, two to three judges is recommended—a group of teachers may serve as judges, or you may invite some community members to judge the contest. Appropriate judges might be local poets, actors, professors, arts reporters, or members of the school board. Judges should have some knowledge of poetry, although they need not be experts. Be sensitive to conflicts of interest—actual or perceived—with your judging panel. Make sure to choose judges who will conscientiously prepare for their roles in advance.

Preparing the Judges

- Send the judges the students' poems ahead of time, so they are familiar with them and can consider students' poem choice in regards to range and complexity. No judge other than the accuracy judge should be following along with the text during recitations.
- Send them a copy of the Judge's Guide, available at PoetryOutLoud.org, and ask them to review fully in advance.
- Invite them to ask questions. Encourage them to watch the archived Poetry Out Loud judge training webinar at PoetryOutLoud.org.
- Encourage them to view the video examples of student recitations on the Poetry Out Loud website and the Poetry Out Loud YouTube channel; they should practice scoring these before the competition.
- Although they will score individually during the competition, it is useful to have judges discuss their scores in orientation practice rounds.
- During an in-person competition, separate the judges a bit from the rest of the audience so they are not distracted. Judges should not have any interaction with the contestants or the audience until after the competition.

- Judges must not convene to discuss their scores. They should rate recitations individually and then immediately turn in their evaluation sheets. This practice not only keeps the contest moving, but also ensures that judges are scoring independently, based on merit only. Notify judges that they will not be able to revisit scores after they turn them in.

Accuracy Judge

Assign a separate person to serve as an accuracy judge. The accuracy judge will mark missed or incorrect words during the recitation. The accuracy score sheet can be found on page 19, and also can be downloaded from PoetryOutLoud.org. Make sure to prepare accuracy score sheets before the contest, and fill in the names of the participants and the titles of the poems they will recite. Have these in order of recitation before the competition and give a set to the accuracy judge, along with a notebook or PDF with large-font text of each poem, in the order of recitation, so they may follow the recitations.

"I enjoyed learning more about myself and discovering what I am capable of. I've always appreciated the deep meanings and subtle messages in poetry, and I enjoy that I finally get to convey that through performance."

—Yohanna Endashaw, 2023 Illinois State Champion

Scoring

A copy of the Poetry Out Loud contest evaluation sheet may be downloaded at PoetryOutLoud.org. Prepare the contest evaluation sheets before the school contest by filling in the names of the participants and the titles of the poems they will recite. Have these in recitation order before the competition, with one set for each judge.

At in-person contests, the score tabulator or an assistant will collect the completed contest evaluation sheets after each recitation. The accuracy judge's score will be added to each evaluation sheet as scores are tabulated. Scoring is cumulative; the scores from each round should be totaled to determine the winner.



"My favorite part of Poetry Out Loud is that this experience provides me with the opportunity to share poems with people just as passionate about poetry as I am."

—James Masson, 2023 New York State Champion

Evaluation Criteria and Tips for Contestants

For video examples of these tips, go to the Poetry Out Loud YouTube page.

▷ PHYSICAL PRESENCE

This category evaluates the physical nature of the recitation. Consider the student's stage presence, body language, and composure.



Advice for the student:

- Present yourself well and be attentive. Use good posture. Be confident and make a direct connection with the audience.
- Nervous gestures and lack of confidence will detract from your score.
- Relax and be natural. Enjoy your poem; the judges will notice.

QUALITIES OF A STRONG RECITATION:



The student appears at ease and comfortable with the audience. They engage the audience through physical presence, including appropriate body language and confidence. All qualities of the student's physical presence work together to the benefit of the poem.

▷ VOICE AND ARTICULATION

This category evaluates the student's delivery and clarity of the recitation. Consider the student's projection, pace, rhythm, intonation, and pronunciation.



Advice for the student:

- Project to the audience. You want to capture the attention of everyone, including the people in the back row. However, do not mistake shouting for good volume or projection.
- Proceed at a fitting and natural pace. People may speak too quickly when they are nervous, which can make a recitation difficult to understand. Do not speak so slowly that the language sounds awkward or unnatural.
- With rhymed poems, be careful not to recite in a sing-song manner.
- Make sure you know how to pronounce every word in your poem. You'll never be penalized for your natural accent; however, affected character accents are strongly discouraged.

- Line breaks are a defining feature of poetry, with each one calling for different treatment. Decide whether a break requires a pause and, if so, how long to pause.

QUALITIES OF A STRONG RECITATION:



All words are pronounced correctly, and the projection, rhythm, and intonation greatly enhance the recitation. Pacing is appropriate to the poem.



INTERPRETATION

This category evaluates the interpretive and performance choices made by the student. A strong recitation must rely on a powerful internalization of the poem rather than excessive gestures or unnecessary emoting. Effective interpretation enhances the audience's understanding and enjoyment of the poem without overshadowing the poem's language. The Learning Recitation videos at PoetryOutLoud.org will help illustrate this point.



Advice for the student:

- Movement must not detract from the poem's voice.
- You are the vessel of your poem. Have confidence that your poem is strong enough to communicate its sounds and messages without a physical illustration. Let the words of the poem do the work.
- Depending on the poem, occasional gestures may be appropriate, but the line between appropriate and overdone is a thin one. When uncertain, leave them out.

- Avoid monotone delivery. If you sound bored, you will project that boredom to the audience. However, too much enthusiasm can make your performance seem insincere.

QUALITIES OF A STRONG RECITATION:



The interpretation subtly underscores the meaning of the poem without becoming the focal point of the recitation. A low score in this category will result from recitations that have affected accents and character voices, inappropriate tone and inflection, singing, excessive gestures, or unnecessary emoting.

"Poetry Out Loud has introduced me to many brilliant young artists and visionaries, and I've had so much to learn in an environment rich with sportsmanship, camaraderie, and genuine passion for poetry."

—Aeva West Deltoro-Dye, 2023 Utah State Champion

EVIDENCE OF UNDERSTANDING

This category evaluates the student's comprehension of a poem. The poet's words should take precedence, and the student who understands the poem best will be able to voice it in a way that helps the audience to understand the poem better. To do this, a student must effectively use intonation, emphasis, tone, and style of delivery.



Advice for the student:

- In order for the audience to have a full understanding of the poem, *you* must have a full understanding of the poem.
- Be attentive to the messages, meanings, allusions, irony, tones of voice, and other nuances in your poem.
- Be sure you know the meaning of every word and line in your poem. If you are unsure about something, it will be apparent to the audience and judges. Don't hesitate to ask your teacher or coach for help.
- Think about how you should interpret the tone and voice of your poem. Is it a quiet poem? Is it a boisterous poem? Should it be recited more quickly or slowly, with a happy or mournful tone? Your interpretation will be different for each poem, and it is a crucial element of your performance.

QUALITIES OF A STRONG RECITATION:



The meaning of the poem is powerfully and clearly conveyed to the audience. The student displays an interpretation that deepens and enlivens the poem. Meaning, messages, allusions, irony, tone, and other nuances are captured by the performance. A low score is awarded if the interpretation obscures the meaning of the poem.

“What I’ve enjoyed most through participating in Poetry Out Loud is meeting other people from different schools and being able to talk about matters important to me through poetry.”

—Gabby Johnson, 2023 North Dakota Champion

▷ OVERALL PERFORMANCE

This category evaluates the overall success of the performance, the degree to which the recitation has become more than the sum of its parts. Has the student captivated the audience with the language of the poem? Did the student bring the audience to a better understanding of the poem? Did the recitation honor the poem? Judges should also consider the range of a student's recitations with this score; a student is less likely to score well in overall



performance when judges note that a student's style of interpretation remains the same regardless of poem choice. In addition to range, judges should consider the complexity of the poem, which is a combination of its content, language, and length. A low score will be awarded for recitations that are poorly presented, ineffective in conveying the meaning of the poem, or conveyed in a manner inappropriate to the poem.

Advice for the student:

- For competitions beyond the classroom level, select poems of various styles, time periods, complexities, themes, and tones. When considering the range and complexity of your poems, remember that a longer poem is not necessarily a more difficult one.
- Make sure each poem you choose is one that speaks to you. If you are able to connect with a poem, that internalization will ripple positively throughout all of your scores.

▷ ACCURACY

A separate judge will mark missed or incorrect words during the recitation, with deductions for each. If the contestant relies on the prompter, points also will be subtracted from the accuracy score from each judge. Eight points will be added to each judge's contest evaluation sheet for a perfectly accurate recitation.



Note: Overall Performance and Accuracy are weighted slightly more than other criteria.

POETRY

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Poetry Out Loud
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Publicity Tips

Since 2005, Poetry Out Loud has reached more than 4.2 million students and 72,000 teachers from 18,000 schools and organizations nationwide. Poetry Out Loud is a great way to raise school spirit and generate positive visibility for your school or organization. Here are some simple ways to increase awareness of Poetry Out Loud, and share your students' achievements with the community at large.

- Post notices announcing the competition and champions at your school/organization and/or on your website, newsletter, student newspaper, or social media pages. Use the Poetry Out Loud logo to celebrate your involvement.
- Announce classroom winners and the schoolwide competition in the daily PA broadcast or at assemblies.
- Include a “poem-a-day” poetry recitation in the daily PA broadcast or at assemblies.
- Remember to use the Poetry Out Loud hashtags—#POL24 and #IAmPoetryOutLoud—to be part of the larger conversation about Poetry Out Loud throughout the school year.
- Use your school’s or organization’s social media accounts to share information about your Poetry Out Loud program.
- If your school allows video sharing websites such as YouTube, use them to highlight videos that complement Poetry Out Loud learning objectives.
- Invite a prominent member of the community or local media to serve as a judge or emcee for the schoolwide competition.
- Arrange for your class to watch online or attend your region or state Poetry Out Loud competition.
- Use the PR toolkit found at PoetryOutLoud.org for additional tips and sample press materials to share information about your competition.

*National Endowment
for the Arts Chair
Dr. Maria Rosario
Jackson with 2023
Poetry Ourselves
winner in the spoken
category, Stella
Wright from
Minnesota.*

CONTEST EVALUATION SHEET

NAME OF STUDENT: _____

TITLE OF POEM: _____

	Weak	Below Average	Average	Good	Excellent	Outstanding
Physical Presence	1	2	3	4	5	6
Voice and Articulation	1	2	3	4	5	6
Interpretation	1	2	3	4	5	6
Evidence of Understanding	1	2	3	4	5	6
Overall Performance	1	2	3	5	7	9

TOTAL: _____ (maximum of 33 points)

ACCURACY JUDGE'S SCORE: _____ (maximum of 8 points)

FINAL SCORE: _____ **(MAXIMUM OF 41 POINTS)**

ACCURACY SCORE SHEET

NAME OF STUDENT: _____

TITLE OF POEM: _____

Maximum Score	8 points
Inaccuracy Deduction (subtract)	- _____ points
Prompt Deduction (subtract)	- _____ points
FINAL ACCURACY SCORE	_____ points*

*Lowest possible score is 1 point

Minor inaccuracies, resulting in a *1 point* deduction per occurrence, include:

- Confusing a pronoun (“he” instead of “she”)
- Confusing an article (“a” instead of “the”)
- Pluralizing a word or vice versa (“horses” instead of “horse”)
- Replacing a word with a similar word (“jump” instead of “leap”)
- Omitting the poem title
- Omitting the author
- Omitting the translator
- Confusing the order of words (“hops and skips” instead of “skips and hops”)
- Skipping a word
- Repeating a word
- Adding a word

Major inaccuracies, resulting in larger deductions per occurrence, include:

- One line out of order: *-2 points*
- Repeating a line: *-2 points*
- Omitting an epigraph: *-2 points*
- Including a footnote: *-2 points*
- Skipping one line/skipping three or more words in the same line: *-3 points*
- Reversing two stanzas: *-5 points*
- Skipping one stanza: *-6 points*

Use of prompter: Each time a student uses the prompter, *3 points* will be deducted from the final accuracy score.

The inclusion or omission of stanza numbers or dedications should not affect scoring. Likewise, the addition of a student introducing themselves by stating their name, state, and/or school at the beginning of a recitation, or the inclusion of a “thank you” at the end of the recitation, while discouraged, should not affect the accuracy score.

ACCURACY JUDGE: Follow along with the text of the poem as the competitor recites. Mark the text each time there is an error in accuracy (mispronunciations are not accuracy errors). You should mark all minor inaccuracies the same (since each is worth a *1 point deduction*), and flag the bigger mistakes differently. Be consistent. After the recitation, use the guidance below to assign a point deduction to each mistake. To get the final accuracy score, count up the point deductions, and subtract them from the maximum score of 8 points. Remember that the accuracy score is added to the contest evaluation sheet of each judge.

Example: If the competitor repeats a word (*-1 point*), confuses an article (*-1 point*), and skips one line (*-3 points*), that would be 5 points subtracted from the maximum score of 8. The final accuracy score would be 3 points.

Rules

Only those who registered with their state Poetry Out Loud coordinator are eligible for the official competition.

Student Eligibility

Grade Level: 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.

State Finals: A student may not advance to the state finals without competing in a lower-level competition.

Legal Participation

Requirements: 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. Schools may determine eligibility for classroom and school level Poetry Out Loud programming pursuant to local and state law.

Prize Requirements: The Poetry Foundation provides and administers all aspects of the monetary prizes awarded in Poetry Out Loud. In order to receive prizes, State champions and runners up must submit a properly-completed IRS Form W-9 or Form W-8BEN in order to be eligible to receive the prize money. Prizes are not transferable and are taxable to the recipient; prizes issued to individuals submitting a Form W-8 may be subject to additional withholding requirements.

Travel and Accommodations

Requirements: The Poetry Foundation provides and administers all aspects of the travel for State Champions to the Poetry Out Loud National Finals. State Champions (or their legal guardians) and their chaperones must submit a properly-completed IRS Form W-9 or Form W-8BEN before travel and lodging are arranged by the Poetry Foundation. The value of travel and lodging are taxable to the recipients; the value of travel and lodging issued to individuals submitting a Form W-8 may be subject to additional withholding requirements.

Homeschooled Students:

Homeschooled students may participate by competing in a contest at a local school (at the school's discretion) or with other local homeschooled students. Contact your state coordinator for more information.

School Not Participating?

Students unable to participate at a local school should contact their state Poetry Out Loud coordinator to discuss other opportunities for inclusion in the state's official competition.

Repeat Champions: National Champions are ineligible to compete in subsequent years even if they are still in grades 9-12.

Relatives: Avoiding any potential conflicts of interest (or the appearance of conflicts of interest) helps to preserve the integrity of the contest and make it fair for all students. Relatives of national organizers (National Endowment for the Arts and the Poetry Foundation) may compete in school, local, regional, and state competitions, but are not eligible to advance to National Finals. Relatives of State Art Agency Coordinators or affiliated contractors and sponsors may not compete past the school level in that particular state. (Relatives are defined as child, sibling, or any member of the employee's household.)

Poem Eligibility

Poem Anthology: All poems must be selected from the Poetry Out Loud print or online anthology, which is updated every summer. Check PoetryOutLoud.org after September 1, 2023, to view the official Poetry Out Loud anthology for the current school year. Only versions of poems from the official anthology may be used in the contest.

Can't Find a Poem? Poems may be removed from the online anthology before September 1, 2023. These poems are no longer eligible for competition. However, any poem in the printed anthology is eligible even if it is not online.

Poem Criteria: At the state and national finals, students must have three poems prepared. One must be 25 lines or fewer, and one must be written before the 20th century. One poem may be used to meet both criteria, and may be the student's third poem.

Competition

Contest Participants: Poetry Out Loud competitions must have at least two students to select a winner. If the winner is unable to attend the next level of competition, the runner-up should be sent.

Evaluation: Students must be judged according to the Poetry Out Loud evaluation criteria (pages 12–15).

Rounds: State and national finals consist of three rounds of competition. Competitions at lower levels may have fewer rounds, but students must recite only one poem in each round.

Poem Order: The order in which the poems are recited is up to the student, but poem order may not be switched once submitted to the competition organizer. Competition organizers may not dictate poem order.

Judging: Rankings are based solely on the official Poetry Out Loud evaluation sheets submitted by judges. Judges should not convene to discuss performances during the competition. Judges may not reconsider their scores after they are submitted. Judges' decisions are final.

Scoring: Scoring is cumulative. The scores from all rounds should be added together to determine the winner.

Ties: In the event of a tie, the tied student with the highest overall performance score should win; if that also results in a tie, look to the highest accuracy score. If scores remain tied, consider having students pick one poem to recite again as a separate score to break the tie.

Memorization: Students must recite their poems from memory.

Props: Students may not use props or wear costumes during their recitations.



State and jurisdictional champions from across the country compete in DC over two days.

NCTE English Language Arts Standards

Poetry Out Loud fulfills the following NCTE Standards: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12.

Teachers who make use of the optional writing activities and lesson plans found at PoetryOutLoud.org will also satisfy Standard #5.

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).

Common Core Standards

Poetry Out Loud aligns with the following Common Core Standards depending on each individual teacher's lesson plan.

Anchor Standards for Reading (RL.9-10, RL.11-12)

Key Ideas and Details

1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

Craft and Structure

4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

Anchor Standards for Language (L.9-10, L.11-12)

Knowledge of Language

3. Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

4. Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.
5. Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

National Core Arts Standards

Poetry Out Loud aligns with the following Common Core Standards depending on each individual teacher's lesson plan.

Anchor Standard #4. Select, analyze and interpret artistic work for presentation.

Anchor Standard #5. Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.

Anchor Standard #6. Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

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ON THE COVER

2023 Poetry Out Loud National Champion Sreepadaarchana Munjuluri

All photos by James Kegley



*2023 Poetry Out Loud
National Finalists*

