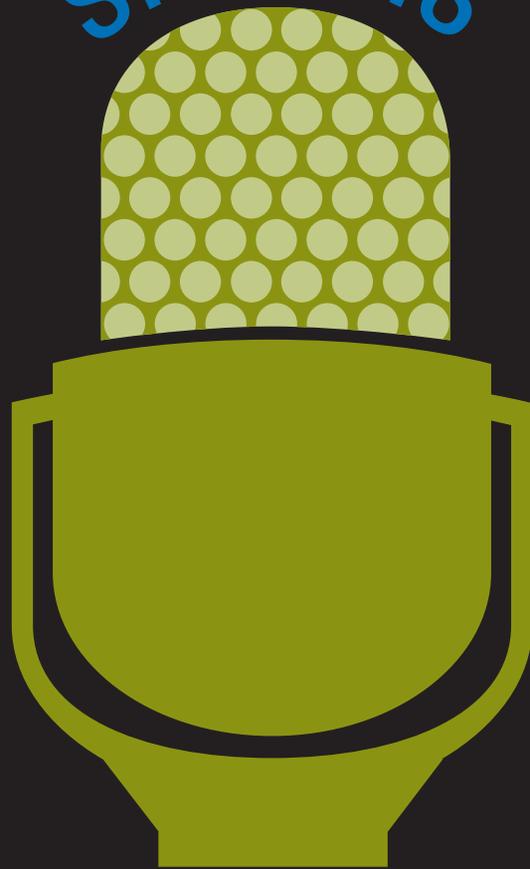


INSPIRING  
STUDENTS



**POETRY**  
**OUT LOUD**®

**2015–2016**

**TEACHER'S  
GUIDE**

Additional copies of this publication can be downloaded at [www.poetryoutloud.org](http://www.poetryoutloud.org)

This publication is published by:

**National Endowment for the Arts**

400 7th Street SW  
Washington, DC 20506-0001  
202-682-5400/arts.gov

**Poetry Foundation**

61 West Superior Street  
Chicago, IL 60654  
312-787-7070/www.poetryfoundation.org



The National Endowment for the Arts was established by Congress in 1965 as an independent agency of the federal government. To date, the NEA has awarded more than \$5 billion to strengthen the creative capacity of our communities by providing all Americans with diverse opportunities for arts participation. The NEA extends its work through partnerships with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector. To join the discussion on how art works, visit the NEA at [arts.gov](http://arts.gov).



The Poetry Foundation, publisher of *Poetry* magazine, is an independent literary organization committed to a vigorous presence for poetry in our culture. It exists to discover and celebrate the best poetry and to place it before the largest possible audience. The Poetry Foundation seeks to be a leader in shaping a receptive climate for poetry by developing new audiences, creating new avenues for delivery, and encouraging new kinds of poetry through innovative partnerships, prizes, and programs.

*Poetry Out Loud is a partnership among the National Endowment for the Arts, the Poetry Foundation, and the state and jurisdictional arts agencies of the United States.*



**Alabama**  
**2015 State Champion**  
**Nicole Louw**



Poet Robert Frost



**Missouri**  
**2015 State Champion**  
**Maya Bryant**



Poet  
Edna St. Vincent Millay



**Wisconsin**  
**2015 State Champion**  
**Ian Walls**



Poet Langston Hughes



**Montana**  
**2015 State Champion**  
**Taylor Rogers**



Poet Dylan Thomas



**Vermont**  
**2015 State Champion**  
**Sam Boudreau**



Poet Emily Dickinson

## Contents

Welcome .....	2
Program Overview .....	3
Rules .....	4
Organizing the Contest Events .....	6
Publicity Tips .....	9
Judging the Contest .....	10
Contest Evaluation Sheet .....	14
Accuracy Score Sheet .....	15
Evaluation Criteria and Tips for Contestants .....	16
Teacher Preparation* .....	19
Suggested Class Schedule .....	20
NCTE English Language Arts Standards .....	21
Common Core Standards .....	22

\*Lesson plans can be found at [poetryoutloud.org](http://poetryoutloud.org)

# Welcome

Can there be any subject more difficult to teach in the modern classroom than poetry? Students who take their culture at the speed of the Internet may not easily find it in 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. “Why should I study this poem,” the 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 Endowment for the Arts and the Poetry Foundation have partnered with state arts agencies on Poetry Out Loud: National Recitation Contest, which helps students master public speaking skills, build self-confidence, and learn about their literary heritage. By encouraging your students to study, memorize, and perform some of the most influential and timeless poems of the English language, you immerse them in powerful expression and provocative ideas.

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. Public speaking is a skill people use every day in both the workplace and the community.

Hearing the spoken words of classic and contemporary 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 one constant in the history of our kind. In this way the recitation of poetry brings history to life; in this way it creates community.

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 compete. Please join us in restoring the energy and esprit of poetry recitation nationwide with Poetry Out Loud.

**National Endowment for the Arts  
Poetry Foundation**

# Program Overview

The NEA and the Poetry Foundation have partnered with the state arts agencies of the United States to support Poetry Out Loud. Since it was piloted in 2005, Poetry Out Loud has grown to include millions of students across the country. Champions from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico compete at the National Finals in Washington, DC, each spring.

## CONTEST STRUCTURE

Poetry Out Loud uses a pyramid structure that begins at the classroom level. Winners advance to a school-wide competition, then to a regional and/or state competition, and ultimately to the National Finals.

**Schools must register with their state Poetry Out Loud coordinator to participate in the official program. Visit [poetryoutloud.org](http://poetryoutloud.org) to identify your state coordinator.**

## CLASSROOM TIME AND SCHEDULE

The curriculum for Poetry Out Loud has been designed to fit into a teacher's busy schedule. The program takes place over the span of 2 to 3 weeks, according to each teacher's interest and schedule, and it does not require full class periods. To accommodate schools' testing demands and vacation calendars, Poetry Out Loud can be implemented at the school-level any time during the fall and through early winter, with slight variations by state. Please check with your state Poetry Out Loud coordinator for your state's specific schedule.

## NCTE AND COMMON CORE STANDARDS

Poetry Out Loud satisfies most of the NCTE English Language Arts Standards as detailed on page 21. In addition to memorizing and performing great poems, students will have the opportunity to discuss poetry and—if the teacher wishes to use the supplemental lesson plans at [poetryoutloud.org](http://poetryoutloud.org)—to write poetry of their own. Alignment with Common Core Standards is set forth on page 22.

## AWARDS

The following 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.

**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 school will receive a \$500 stipend for the purchase of poetry materials. One runner-up in each state will receive \$100; his or her school will receive \$200 for the purchase of poetry materials.

**National Awards:** 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.

*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.*

# Rules

The following is a list of rules that apply to Poetry Out Loud. For more details on these rules and other guidance on the competition, please thoroughly review this entire guide.

**Only schools 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.
- **Citizenship:** Competitors at the state and national finals must be U.S. citizens or permanent residents with valid tax identification or Social Security numbers. Tax identification or Social Security numbers are required to receive prizes, including cash payments or travel awards. Students are responsible for verifying their eligibility. State coordinators and teachers are responsible for notifying students about legal participation requirements.
- **State Finals:** A student may not advance to the state finals without competing in a lower-level competition.
- **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 specific guidelines.
- **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:** Only National Champions are not eligible to compete in subsequent years.

## 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](http://poetryoutloud.org) after September 1, 2015, 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, 2015. 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 3 poems prepared. One must be 25 lines or fewer, and one must be written before the 20th century. The same poem may be used to meet both criteria, and may be the student's third poem.

## COMPETITION

- **School Competition:** Schools must hold a competition of at least 2 students to select their champion. If that champion 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 from the 2015–2016 Teacher’s Guide (pages 16-18).
- **Rounds:** State and national finals consist of 3 rounds of competition. Competitions at lower levels may have fewer rounds, but students must recite only 1 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 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 1 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.

## LEGAL PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS

- No student may be excluded from participation in this program on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, disability, or national origin.
- Schools may determine eligibility for classroom- and school-level Poetry Out Loud programs pursuant to local and state law.
- Participation in both the state finals and the National Finals is restricted to U.S. citizens or permanent residents with valid tax identification or Social Security numbers, in keeping with federal law.
- Foreign exchange students and other visitors are not eligible to compete for titles or official awards at the state and national level, unless they are U.S. citizens or permanent residents.

# Organizing the Contest Events

## LEAD TEACHER(S)

We recommend that each school identify 1 or 2 teachers to serve as the Poetry Out Loud coordinators. Duties for lead teachers will include enlisting fellow teachers to participate, distributing materials, organizing the school events, and keeping in touch with the state Poetry Out Loud coordinator.

Begin organizing your school event as early as possible in order to ensure greater attendance by the school community. Please see page 9 for tips on promoting the event. Additional guidance, including sample press releases, can be found at [poetryoutloud.org](http://poetryoutloud.org).

## NUMBER OF POEMS AT EACH CONTEST LEVEL

For the classroom contest, students must prepare at least 1 poem to recite. Participants in the school finals should prepare 2 poems for recitation. Students who advance to the state and national levels must have 3 poems prepared. Students will recite their poems in rounds, not consecutively, delivering 1 poem in each round. A third round, if included, may consist of a smaller number of the highest-scoring competitors.

## POEM SELECTION

Students must select poems from the official Poetry Out Loud print or online anthologies. Not all poems on the CD, DVD, online videos, or in the lesson plans are eligible for the competition. **Any poem in the printed anthology is eligible even if it is not available online.**

It is strongly recommended that students who compete beyond the classroom level select poems of various styles, complexities, time periods, and voices. Diversity in the selections will offer a richer and more complete performance. For the state and national competitions, students must select 1 poem of 25 lines or fewer and 1 poem written before the 20th century. The same poem may be used to meet both requirements, and may be the student's third poem. Eligible poems are available at [poetryoutloud.org](http://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. This will enable the coordinator to have copies of the poems collated for the judges and prompter, and contest evaluation sheets prepared. Organizers may not dictate which poems are to be recited in which rounds.

## INTRODUCING AND RECITING THE POEM

At the competition, 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. (For example, "'The Lake Isle of Innisfree,' by William Butler Yeats" or "'The New Colossus,' by Emma Lazarus.")

- A student's own editorial comments before or after the poem are not allowed.
- Recitations must include epigraphs if included in the Poetry Out Loud anthology, 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.
- The poem must be delivered from memory.

## VENUE

Reserve a school theater, auditorium, or other appropriate venue. The ideal setting will have a stage and theater-style seating. Competitors will stand alone on stage in front of the audience while reciting their poems. Other competitors may either be seated to the side of the stage or in the front row of the audience. Depending on the size of the venue, amplification may be appropriate.

## LENGTH OF CONTEST – SCHOOLS

Classroom contests can be held during class periods. A school's final contest should run less than 2 hours; any longer than that can be difficult for the audience. Ideally, 6 to 15 students should compete in each school's final contest. If your school has 6 to 15 classes participating in the program, send 1 winner from each class to the school finals. If fewer than 6 classes are participating, 2 students from each class may advance to the school finals. If more than 15 classes are participating, you might consider holding grade-level competitions first, allowing 2 or 3 students from each grade to advance to the school finals. In structuring your contest(s), keep in mind that each recitation takes approximately 3 to 4 minutes. Judges will require another minute to mark scores, yielding a rough average of 4 to 5 minutes per recitation.

## STAFFING THE COMPETITION

At the school-wide competition, you will need volunteers to serve in a variety of roles:

**Coordinator** (1 or 2). The lead teacher(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, scoring is accurate, etc.

**Emcee** (1). An emcee will guide the competition from start to finish, providing welcoming remarks, introducing judges and students, and announcing winners. The emcee or the coordinator will need to keep an eye on the judges to make sure they have enough time to complete their scoring before the next student begins to recite. Since judges may need a minute between recitations to finish scoring and hand in their evaluation sheets, you may want to ask the emcee to entertain the audience or fill that time with biographical information about the poets or competing students (which you would need to have prepared in advance). Another idea is to have music, live or recorded, between recitations.

**Judges** (3–5), accuracy judge (1). See page 10 of this Teacher's Guide for advice on selecting and preparing judges.

**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 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](http://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.**

**Ushers.** You may want to create a program for the event that lists the competitors and the poems they will be reciting, while also recognizing any local donors that contributed to the contest. If so, plan on a few ushers to hand out programs.

## SAMPLE SCHEDULE

A typical school competition may look something like this, based on 10 students, an average recitation time of 3–4 minutes each, and 1 minute between recitations for scoring:

---

<b>1:00 pm</b>	Welcoming remarks and introduction of the judging panel, prompter, and accuracy judge. Recognition of any sponsors. Recap of the evaluation criteria for judging the recitations.
<b>1:05</b>	Calibration Round. A volunteer not participating in the actual contest recites a sample poem so the judges can practice scoring.
<b>1:10–2:30</b>	Recitations, taking place in 2 rounds. In the first round, students will recite their first poem. In the second round, students will recite their second poem.
<b>2:30</b>	Five-minute intermission for scoring to be completed, and winner and runner-up to be determined.
<b>2:35</b>	Announcement of winner and runner-up. Presentation of certificates and any prizes.

---

## AWARDS

A certificate of participation is available at [poetryoutloud.org](http://poetryoutloud.org). You may wish to solicit prizes from local donors, if appropriate. Select a school champion as well as a runner-up. Depending on the guidelines of your state competition, 1 or both of these students may advance to the next level of competition. Please check with your state Poetry Out Loud coordinator.

# Publicity Tips

Poetry Out Loud has reached nearly 3 million students and 45,000 teachers from more than 7,300 schools nationwide in the past decade. The Poetry Out Loud contest is a great way to raise school spirit and generate positive visibility for your school. Here are some simple ways to increase awareness of Poetry Out Loud, as well as share your students' achievements, with the community at large.

## IN YOUR SCHOOL

- Display a Poetry Out Loud poster in the school library, cafeteria, or hallway.
- Post a "save-the-date" notice on the school calendar and on bulletin boards throughout the school.
- Send a notice announcing classroom champions to the school website or newsletter.
- Publicize the school-wide competition on the school website and in the student newspaper.
- Write an article about the school-wide contest for your PTA newsletter.
- Announce classroom winners and the school-wide competition, in the daily PA broadcast, or at assemblies.
- Include a "poem-a-day" poetry recitation in the daily PA broadcast.

## SOCIAL MEDIA TIPS

- Teachers can post Poetry Out Loud assignments and results on their individual blogs. School blogs can post updates on Poetry Out Loud school contests.
- Set up a free Twitter account for your school or classroom. Remember to use the Poetry Out Loud hashtag — #POL16 — to be part of the larger conversation about POL throughout the school year.
- Set up a Facebook page for Poetry Out Loud at your school; post updates on the program.
- When posting POL photos to Instagram, use the hashtag #iampoetryoutloud.
- If your school allows video sharing websites such as YouTube, use them to highlight videos that complement Poetry Out Loud learning objectives.
- If you use broadcast channels to feature students reciting poems, please be aware of poetry usage rights. Unless the poem recited is public domain (published in or before 1923), you are responsible for investigating copyright permissions to contemporary poems through the rightsholders. Rightsholder information for contemporary poems can be found on the individual poem pages on poetryoutloud.org.

## IN YOUR COMMUNITY

- Call your community newspaper (we suggest the metro section editor), and invite a reporter to attend the school-wide competition. See the sample media advisory on poetryoutloud.org.
- Invite a prominent member of the local media to serve as a judge or emcee for the school-wide competition.
- After the event, send the local newspaper a follow-up press release highlighting the contest, along with photos from your event. See the sample follow-up press release on poetryoutloud.org.
- Send a letter to the editor of your local newspaper. Use the letter to showcase your school's participation and to discuss the benefits of poetry in the classroom.

# Judging the Contest

## JUDGING THE CLASSROOM AND SCHOOL CONTESTS

The teacher can serve as the sole judge for a classroom contest. At the school finals, 3 judges should be sufficient—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, politicians, 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.

A copy of the Poetry Out Loud contest evaluation sheet may be downloaded at [poetryoutloud.org](http://poetryoutloud.org). Print the contest evaluation sheets before the school contest, and fill in the names of the participants and the titles of the poems they will recite. Have these in the order of recitation before the competition, with 1 set for each judge.

### Prepare the judges in advance:

- Send them the students' poems ahead of time, printed out or electronically, 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 printed text during recitations—they will be too distracted.
- Send them a copy of the Judge's Guide, printed from [poetryoutloud.org](http://poetryoutloud.org), and ask them to review fully in advance.
- Invite them to ask questions and schedule an orientation or conference call prior to the contest so all judges have consistent scoring advice. Encourage them to watch the archived Poetry Out Loud judge training webinar at [poetryoutloud.org](http://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 the 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 has ended.

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. Warn judges that they will not be able to revisit scores after they turn them in.

After each recitation, the score tabulator or an assistant will collect the completed contest evaluation sheets. **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.

## 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 15, and also can be downloaded from [poetryoutloud.org](http://poetryoutloud.org). Print out the 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 with a large-font copy of each poem, in the order of recitation, so he or she may follow the recitations.



*From left: 2015 Third Place Finalist Casey Goggin of North Carolina, 2015 Second Place Finalist Paris Stroud of Georgia, and 2015 National Champion Maeva Ordaz of Alaska.*



PO  
OU



# POETRY OUT LOUD

*Poetry Out Loud Champions  
gather for the 2015 National  
Finals on April 29 at the Lisner  
Auditorium in Washington, DC.*



# Contest Evaluation Sheet

NAME OF STUDENT:

TITLE OF POEM:

	Weak	Below Average	Average	Good	Excellent	Outstanding
Physical Presence	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	6 <input type="checkbox"/>
Voice and Articulation	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	6 <input type="checkbox"/>
Dramatic Appropriateness	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	6 <input type="checkbox"/>
Evidence of Understanding	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	6 <input type="checkbox"/>
Overall Performance	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	7 <input type="checkbox"/>	9 <input type="checkbox"/>

TOTAL: \_\_\_\_\_ (maximum of 33 points)

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

**FINAL SCORE:** \_\_\_\_\_ **(MAXIMUM OF 41 POINTS)**

# Poetry Out Loud 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

**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. 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 repeated a word (-1 point), confused an article (-1 point), and skipped one line (-3 points), that would be 5 points subtracted from the maximum score of 8. The final accuracy score would be 3 points.

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

- Confusing a pronoun (“he” instead of “she”)
- Confusing the order of words (“hops and skips” instead of “skips and hops”)
- Confusing an article (“a” instead of “the”)
- Skipping a word
- Pluralizing a word or vice-versa (“horses” instead of “horse”)
- Repeating a word
- Replacing a word with a similar word (“jump” instead of “leap”)
- 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
- Skipped 1 line/skipped 3 or more words in the same line -3 points
- Reversed 2 stanzas -5 points
- Skipped 1 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 “Thank you” at the end of the recitation, while discouraged, should not affect the accuracy score.*

# Evaluation Criteria and Tips for Contestants

Teachers, coaches, and students may also find it useful to view the scoring rubric in the Judge's Guide. Guidance on implementing Poetry Out Loud for students with disabilities is available at [poetryoutloud.org](http://poetryoutloud.org).

## PHYSICAL PRESENCE

This category evaluates the physical nature of the recitation. Consider the student's **eye contact**, **body language**, and **poise**.

### ***Advice for the student:***

- Present yourself well and be attentive. Use good posture. Be confident.
- Use eye contact to make a direct connection with the entire audience; don't focus solely on the judges.
- Nervous gestures, poor eye contact with the audience, and lack of poise or 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. He or she engages the audience through physical presence, including appropriate body language, confidence, and eye contact—without appearing artificial. All qualities of the student's physical presence work together to the benefit of the poem.

## VOICE AND ARTICULATION

This category evaluates the auditory nature of the recitation. Consider the student's **volume**, **pace**, **rhythm**, **intonation**, and **proper pronunciation**. At the National Finals, contestants will use a microphone; when appropriate, one should be used in school and state competitions as well.

### ***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 yelling for good volume or projection.
- Proceed at a fitting and natural pace. People may speak or express themselves too quickly when they are nervous, which can make a recitation difficult to understand. Do not speak so slowly that the language sounds unnatural, awkward, or falsely dramatic.
- 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. Articulate.
- 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 volume, rhythm, and intonation greatly enhance the recitation. Pacing is appropriate to the poem.

## DRAMATIC APPROPRIATENESS

This category evaluates the interpretive and performance choices made by the student. Recitation is about conveying a poem's sense through its language. This is a challenging task, but a strong performance must rely on a powerful internalization of the poem rather than distracting gestures or unnecessary emoting.

The student represents the poem's voice during the course of a recitation, not a character's. The videos of National Finals recitations at [poetryoutloud.org](http://poetryoutloud.org) will help illustrate this point. Appropriate dramatization enhances the audience's understanding and enjoyment of the poem without overshadowing the poem's language.

### ***Advice for the student:***

- Do not act out each word of the poem. This can distract your audience from the language of the poem. Movement or accents 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. In other words, 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 dramatization 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 character voices and accents, inappropriate tone and inflection, singing, distracting and excessive gestures, or unnecessary emoting.**

## EVIDENCE OF UNDERSTANDING

This category evaluates the student's comprehension and mastery 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 understand the poem fully, you must understand the poem fully. 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 for help.
- Listen to track 4 on the audio CD (or on the Poetry Out Loud website) in which poet David Mason introduces Yeats's "The Lake Isle of Innisfree." In his comments, he advises you to think about how you should interpret the tone and volume and voice of your poem. Is it

a quiet poem? Is it a boisterous poem? Should it be read 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, tones of voice**, and other nuances are captured by the performance. A low score is awarded if the interpretation obscures the meaning of the poem.

## **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 physical presence, voice and articulation, and dramatic appropriateness all seem on target and unified to breathe life into the poem? Does the student understand and show mastery of the art of recitation? The judges will use this score to measure how impressed they were by the recitation, and whether the recitation has honored 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—bearing in mind that a longer poem is not necessarily a more complex one. 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 complex 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.

# Teacher Preparation

- 1. Have students browse the poems.** We have provided an extensive online anthology searchable by keyword. Allow time for the students to explore the selections, either as homework or a classroom activity, and have the students pick some poems they may memorize.
- 2. Begin class with a poem a day.** Another way to expose students to poetry that they might not discover on their own is to read or recite a poem to them at the start of each class period. This role might be performed by the teacher, students, or both. Poetryoutloud.org has a poet of the day feature, including poems and poet biographies that may be read aloud.
- 3. Ask each student to select poems to memorize.** Allowing students to choose their own poems enhances the educational value of the program. Encourage them to build up range and complexity, keeping in mind that long poems are not always the most complex. You may want to have them master a poem with a simpler narrative first and then have them pick a poem they are attracted to but might not completely understand. The process of memorizing and reciting should help students internalize the author's message and further explore phrases and lines they could not master initially. Find student videos on the selection and memorization of poems at poetryoutloud.org.
- 4. Discuss the poems in class.** Understanding the text is the most important preparation for reciting poetry aloud. If a student doesn't understand the text, neither will the audience. Lead class discussions about the students' selected poems.
- 5. Have students memorize the poems.** Share these memorization tips with your students:
  - Rewrite your poem by hand several times. Each time, try to write more and more of it from memory.
  - Read your poem aloud 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. You'll find several moments throughout the day to reread or recite it.
  - Practice your poem by saying it to family and friends.
- 6. Model recitation skills in the classroom.**
  - With the class, develop a list of bad habits that take away from the performance, such as inaudible volume, speaking too quickly or too slowly, monotone voice, fidgeting, overacting, and mispronunciations.
  - Then develop a list of elements of a successful recitation, such as sufficient volume, an appropriate speed with the proper pauses, voice inflection, evidence of understanding, correct pronunciation, and eye contact with the audience.
  - Play portions of the audio and the videos as further examples.
  - Recite poems yourself — this is a powerful way to show students it can be done.
- 7. Practice the poems.** Allow class time for students to practice their poems. Break the class into pairs of students (rotating each session), and have each student practice with a partner. Partners should offer constructive criticism, using the contest evaluation sheet and evaluation criteria as a guide.
- 8. Include creative writing exercises.** Creative writing is a natural complement to Poetry Out Loud. For that reason, we have included a number of optional writing exercises and lesson plans for teachers at poetryoutloud.org.

# Suggested Class Schedule

- WEEK 1**
- **Have students explore the anthologies and choose poems to memorize.**  
(1 full class session)
  - **Read and discuss some of the poems in class.**  
(2–3 full class sessions)
  - **Model effective and ineffective recitation practices for the students.**  
(1 full class session)
- 

- WEEK 2**
- **Have students practice their poems with different partners each day.**  
They should also work on their memorization and performance outside of school. Students should have their poems completely memorized and be able to recite without using a printed copy by the end of the week.  
(15 minutes per day)
  - **Hold practice contests.**  
Break up the class into groups. Have 1 student at a time perform for the rest of the group, who act as judges. Discuss the scoring choices with them. Encourage discussion about how the student interpreted and presented the poem.  
(1 full class session)
  - **Implement the lesson plans and writing exercises.**  
While reserving a portion of each class period for recitation practice, you may offer a more complete poetry unit by using the lesson plans provided at [poetryoutloud.org](http://poetryoutloud.org).  
(1–5 full class sessions, optional)
  - **Hold the classroom recitation contests at the end of the week.**  
Bear in mind that it takes an average of 4 or 5 minutes to recite a poem and judge the recitation. Teachers should structure the contest in a way that best fits their schedules.  
(1–2 full class sessions)
- 

- WEEK 3**
- **Hold the school-wide recitation contest at the end of the week.**  
Winners of the classroom contests will prepare 2 or 3 poems for recitation and will compete in the school-wide competition at the end of this week. Ideally, the school-wide competition will take place at a campus assembly, thus enhancing the entire student body's exposure to poetry and giving the contestants a larger audience. Students who have competed before big groups will be more comfortable with the audiences at the state competitions and National Finals.  
(1–2 hours; school assembly)

# 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](http://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.





Additional copies of this publication can be downloaded at [www.poetryoutloud.org](http://www.poetryoutloud.org)

This publication is published by:

**National Endowment for the Arts**

400 7th Street SW  
Washington, DC 20506-0001  
202-682-5400/arts.gov

**Poetry Foundation**

61 West Superior Street  
Chicago, IL 60654  
312-787-7070/www.poetryfoundation.org



The National Endowment for the Arts was established by Congress in 1965 as an independent agency of the federal government. To date, the NEA has awarded more than \$5 billion to strengthen the creative capacity of our communities by providing all Americans with diverse opportunities for arts participation. The NEA extends its work through partnerships with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector. To join the discussion on how art works, visit the NEA at [arts.gov](http://arts.gov).



The Poetry Foundation, publisher of *Poetry* magazine, is an independent literary organization committed to a vigorous presence for poetry in our culture. It exists to discover and celebrate the best poetry and to place it before the largest possible audience. The Poetry Foundation seeks to be a leader in shaping a receptive climate for poetry by developing new audiences, creating new avenues for delivery, and encouraging new kinds of poetry through innovative partnerships, prizes, and programs.

*Poetry Out Loud is a partnership among the National Endowment for the Arts, the Poetry Foundation, and the state and jurisdictional arts agencies of the United States.*



[www.poetryoutloud.org](http://www.poetryoutloud.org)



National  
Endowment  
for the Arts  
[arts.gov](http://arts.gov)

