

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS
and
POETRY FOUNDATION
present



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**ALASKA STATE COUNCIL ON THE ARTS
& JUNEAU ARTS & HUMANITIES COUNCIL ANNOUNCE
TONG THAO AS THE 2013 POETRY OUT LOUD ALASKA STATE CHAMPION**



Alaska State Champion Tong Thao of Colony High School in Palmer, Alaska, recites "Heaven" by Cathy Song during the Poetry Out Loud Alaska State Finals Tuesday, March 19, 2013 at the Juneau Arts and Culture Center in Juneau, Alaska. (Photo by Seanna O'Sullivan Photography)

Juneau, Alaska — Rising to the top of a competitive pool of more than 4,000 students across the state, Tong Thao from Colony High School in Palmer, Alaska, received the title of 2013 Poetry Out Loud Alaska State Champion at the state finals held at the Juneau Arts & Culture Center on March 19, 2013. The first runner-up was Brittini Tully from Revilla Alternative High School in Ketchikan. Tong's final recitation was *I Remember, I Remember*, a reflective poem reminiscing on a bright childhood viewed in the light of a darker "now," by the British 19th century humorist and poet Thomas Hood.

"Poetry Out Loud has really helped me feel more comfortable speaking in front of an audience," said Tong Thao. "I have to say, the State Finals was one of the best experiences of my life so far. I have met

so many inspiring people who enjoy poetry just as much as I do. And being announced the Alaska State Champion was shocking because I had never thought I would make it to the national finals, much less the state finals. Poetry Out Loud has opened doors for me, and I would recommend any high school students to take part in it, whether it's to challenge themselves or just for the love of poetry. Poetry Out Loud is PRODIGIOUS."

Poetry Out Loud is a national arts education program that encourages the study of great poetry by offering educational materials and a dynamic recitation competition to high schools across the country. Beginning at the classroom level, winners advance to a school-wide competition, then to a regional competition and the state competition. Ultimately, state winners travel all expenses

paid to the National Finals in Washington, DC. Over 365,000 students from more than 2,000 American high schools took part in the 2011–2012 Poetry Out Loud program.

At the state finals in Juneau, which was telecast and streamed live by 360 North, contestants recited works they selected from an anthology of more than 650 classic and contemporary poems. The anthology, a website (www.poetryoutloud.org), a teacher's guide, and media samples of poetry recitation were created by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Poetry Foundation as free resources for high school students and teachers.

The Alaska State Champion Tong Thao received an award of \$200 and an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, DC, to compete for the national championship. Tong's school, Colony High, in the Mat-Su school district, received a \$500 stipend to purchase poetry books. First runner-up Brittni Tully received \$100, with \$200 for her school library. The eight other Alaska State Finalists were: Natalia Spengler from Juneau Douglas High School, Juneau; Samantha Saige Thomas from Chugiak High School, Chugiak; Sarina Montgomery from Lathrop High School, Fairbanks; Hazel Underwood from Kenny Lake School, Kenny Lake; Mark Sawyer Gillilan from IDEA - Region K, Kenai; Thaddeus Steve from Tukurngailnguq School, Stebbins; Annemarie Pike from Sitka High School, Sitka; and Andrea Irrigoo from Nome, representing Kodiak High School, Kodiak.

Guest judges presided over the competition, including writer, photographer, musician and conservationist Kim Heacox of Gustavus; playwright and screenwriter Dave Hunsaker of Juneau; author Lynn Schooler of Juneau; Assistant Professor of Creative Writing Emily Wall of Juneau; retired high school English teacher, radio broadcaster and journalist JoAnn Ross Cunningham of Haines; as well as Juneau CPA and partner with Elgee Rehfeld Mertz Bridget Lujan who served as the Accuracy Judge. Judges evaluated student performances on criteria including physical presence, evidence of understanding, level of difficulty, and accuracy.

While in Juneau, the contestants visited the University of Alaska Southeast Campus, met with their Legislators and toured the Governor's House.

Poetry Out Loud seeks to foster the next generation of literary readers by building on the resurgence of poetry as an oral art form. Through Poetry Out Loud, students master public speaking skills, build self-confidence, and learn about their literary heritage. Now in its eighth year of national competition, Poetry Out Loud has inspired hundreds of thousands of high school students to discover classic and contemporary poetry. To find out how to get involved in the Poetry Out Loud National Recitation Contest, visit www.poetryoutloud.org.

About Alaska State Council on the Arts

The Alaska State Council on the Arts is a state agency that fosters the development of the arts for all Alaskans through education, partnerships, grants and services.

About Juneau Arts and Humanities Council

The Juneau Arts and Humanities Council (JAHC), incorporated in 1973, is the formal arts agency for the Capital City of Juneau, Alaska. It operates the Juneau Arts and Culture Center (JACC) a vibrant community center. The Juneau Arts and Humanities Council cultivates vibrant arts and cultural opportunities and is a leader in building a strong, prosperous community where creativity and innovation thrive.

About the Poetry Foundation

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 literary prizes and programs. For more information, please visit www.poetryfoundation.org

About the National Endowment for the Arts

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 \$4 billion to support artistic excellence, creativity, and innovation for the benefit of individuals and communities. 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.

Photos from The State Finals: <http://smu.gs/14tQaKS>

Video of the Alaska finalists commenting on their experience:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=nYXFj4K3VPs

See the whole state finals online here: <http://www.360north.org/poetry-out-loud-2013/>

The Alaska Poetry Out Loud State Finals will be broadcast on 360 North on March 30th, 2013 at 8pm.

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