

Teens to demonstrate a love for language at poetry competition

Recitation will take place at High Street Arts Center

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Students representing 10 Ventura County high schools will vie for a chance to advance to state and national contests and win a \$20,000 scholarship offered by the Poetry Out Loud organization.

The poetry recitation competition will take place from 4 to 6 p.m. Wed., Feb. 20 at the High Street Arts Center at 45 E. High St., Moorpark. The event is free to the public. Each student will select and recite two poems from the anthology at www.poetryoutloud.org.

"A series of powerful performances are guaranteed," said Muriel Johnson, director of the

California Arts Council, which runs the state competition.

Participants can earn hundreds of dollars in the state competition and thousands at the national finals of Poetry Out Loud. The national poetry competition, backed by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Poetry Foundation, engages high school students in the presentation of poetry through memorization and performance.

"The goal of the competition is to engender a love of poetry and an appreciation of literature and the arts in our young people," said Mary Sagala Verdeur, Poetry Out Loud representative for Moorpark.

Standing onstage to recite and perform poetry is a valuable experience that helps young people to

develop public-speaking skills, boosts self-confidence and poise. "Poetry is an important art form and one of the highest levels of expression," said the local poet.

About 11 students at the High School at Moorpark College and 15 students at Moorpark High School competed at their individual schools to earn a spot in the county finals.

"I've always been in love with words," said Haifa Nesheiwat, who won the Moorpark High School poetry contest.

Nesheiwat recited "Beauty" by Tony Hoagland. The poem is about a girl whose life revolved around being pretty.

The subject of the poem dated a star football player and perfected the art of being a dumb blonde but learned a valuable lesson when she became sick and was forced to take medication that deteriorated her looks, Nesheiwat said. "She never saw how life is pretty until she became ugly," she said. After that, the girl decided to stop trying to be beautiful and decided to enjoy life.

"I chose that poem because I feel many teenagers put on an appearance and they forget that beauty comes from within," said Nesheiwat.

To win the contests, presenters must be accurate and able to communicate the meaning of the poem they memorized. Contestants are evaluated based on recitation skills, said Bri Holmes, a senior at the High School at Moorpark College who won a spot to compete in the countywide event.

Holmes, a Simi Valley resident, said she participated in the event because she enjoys poetry and lit-

erature and wanted a chance to win the scholarship funds.

One person will go on to represent Ventura County at a state contest, and students who move on to the national level will compete to win the \$20,000 scholarship.

This is the first year that Ventura County is participating in the event. Local resident Pennie Patterson is the county representative for both Poetry Out Loud and the Ventura County Arts Council, which is sponsoring the local event.

Ventura is one of 20 counties to participate statewide in 2007-08.

"Young people interested in rap and slam contests can be surprisingly interested in classical poetry when it's presented through the Poetry Out Loud competition," said Johnson.

"We've seen students from all backgrounds and academic levels embrace this program wholeheartedly. It can change their lives," she said.