



Al Head, Executive Director, Alabama State Council on the Art and Youssef Biaz.  
Photo by Julian Green.

## **For immediate release**

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### **Alabama State Council on the Arts names State Champion for Poetry Out Loud**

On Monday, February 21, 2011, twenty-four students converged on Montgomery from high schools all over the state to compete in the Alabama finals of the Poetry Out Loud National Recitation competition. Students, their teachers and parents arrived at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival to recite and hear their poetry. These students, already winners in their own regions, gave moving renditions of poetry from well-known poets such as Langston Hughes, C.S. Lewis, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Jean Valentine. The students also performed their own original poems about truth and friendship, personal identity and tragic life experiences. It was a day filled with laughter, thoughtfulness and tears, proving to all that Alabama students have the power to speak with voices very much worth hearing.

First place in the Alabama Poetry Out Loud National Recitation Competition went to Youssef Biaz, a senior at Auburn High School. Youssef is a student of Mr. Davis Thompson. This was Youssef's second year participating in the Poetry Out Loud competition. He will be traveling to Washington, D.C. for the second time in April, all expenses paid, to represent Alabama in the National Finals. Youssef's family and friends were there to celebrate his victory. Margaret (Peggy) Payne, an 11th grade student at St. Peter's Academy, in New Market came in second place. Peggy is a student of Mr. James M. Payne.

In the Original Poetry Competition, Margaret (Peggy) Payne placed first, with her poem titled "He Was Just a Cat." Second place went to Peyton Presto, a 10<sup>th</sup> grader at Good Hope High School in Cullman, with her poem titled "To Forget Remembering."

Poetry Out Loud is a national arts education program presented by the [National Endowment for the Arts](#) and the [Poetry Foundation](#) in partnership with state arts councils nationwide. In Alabama, the [Alabama State Council on the Arts](#) partners with the [Alabama Alliance for Arts Education](#). It encourages the mastery of great poetry by offering educational materials and a dynamic competition of high schools across the country. Poetry Out Loud uses a pyramid structure. Beginning at the classroom level, winners advance to a school-wide competition, regional competitions, the state competition, and ultimately to the National Finals in Washington, D.C.

The winner of the Alabama finals of Poetry Out Loud is awarded \$200, and the student's school receives a \$500 stipend for the purchase of poetry books. The second place winner receives \$100, and the student's school receives \$200 for the school library. Winners in the Original Poetry competition receive \$150 for first place, \$75 for second place, as well as books that encourage their independent writing. The monetary awards for the Original Poetry Competition are provided by the [Alabama Writers' Forum](#). The Poetry Out Loud National Finals will award a total of \$50,000 in scholarships and school stipends, with a \$20,000 college scholarship for the Poetry Out Loud National Champion.

For additional information about this event, please contact Diana Green, Arts in Education Program Manager, Alabama State Council on the Arts: 334/242-4076 Ext. 241 or [Diana.green@arts.alabama.gov](mailto:Diana.green@arts.alabama.gov). or Donna Russell, Executive Director, Alabama Alliance for Arts Education, 334/269-1435 or [aaae@bellsouth.net](mailto:aaae@bellsouth.net)