5th Anniversary
REFLECTIONS ON THE NATION’S HIGHEST HONOR FOR YOUTH
POETS PRESENTING ORIGINAL WORK
2012–2016
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5th Anniversary Reflection

The President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers partner to present the National Student Poets Program (NSPP), the country’s highest honor for youth poets presenting original work. Five outstanding high school poets whose work exhibits exceptional creativity, dedication to craft, and promise are selected annually for a year of service as national poetry ambassadors.

National Student Poets are chosen from among the National Medalists in the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards by a jury of literary luminaries and leaders in education and the arts. Student Poets receive college scholarships and opportunities to present their work at writing and poetry events throughout their term.

The National Student Poets Program is supported in part by funds from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, with private support provided by an anonymous donor, the Poetry Foundation, the Bernstein Family Foundation, and the Academy of American Poets.

In commemoration of the fifth anniversary of the National Student Poets Program, the alums from the Classes of 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015 came together as a community to organize, craft, and edit a collaborative poem. This Fifth Anniversary Chapbook honors the bond formed within each Class of National Student Poets as well as the community of youth poets the Program has built. This commemorative chapbook serves as a testament to the impact the Program has had—as well as a look forward to the impact it will continue to have in the future.

artandwriting.org/NSPP
facebook.com/NationalStudentPoetsProgram
Classes of 2012–15 Collaborative Poem

As an independent celebration of the Program's fifth anniversary, the Classes of 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015 connected to create a collaborative poem reflecting on their experiences as National Student Poets, their place in society, and their futures as poets.

Ambassadors
Featuring the Classes of 2012–2015

I. BEFORE

I sat on top of the mountain
and asked it to give me a poem.

Leaves fell—
I was not interested in grasshopper poetry.

The valley offered its old war songs,
and I cast them back down like stones.

I hated poetry—every line a nettle-feathered
peacock of strut and pomp,
a world entirely in two dimensions,
whose inhabitants live, love, and perceive naught.

At fourteen, I was waiting for a sign.
When I woke up I
already knew that yesterday was different.

This couldn't have been expected.

Was it a dream, a lie, a promise,
something else not in the human vocabulary?

I was a tooth wringing the last tugs of sugar from bubblegum.
I looked for ways
to breach this body.

Our inner worlds in which we longed
to be wise, to be kind, to be not so scared.

I followed my pencil across the page
and wrote myself into a new year.

II. DURING

I follow my poems into rooms full of words
on slips of paper clutched between students' fingers,
rearranged and read out loud.

The poems are no longer my own.
The words are full-grown
and growing still, a cinnamon candy
that never runs out, a house that burns
in winter and melts a halo of grass, a dream
of a golden wasp.

I arrange children in a classroom
like words on a page.

I am standing on stage in Lincoln Center
trynna' build a new world by passing on my passion.

I am using my words
as a broom, sweeping away
the tangle and the disarray.

Consider distance. How vast the span
between our homes. How far we have driven on
cracked highways, cleaving the endless open air,
to push together and fill the West with words.
There is nothing else on the Salt Lake plain as we pack this room, scribbling hand against elbow, out of stubbly pencils, tips chewed and erasers bitten. The tongue learns slow, each must be coaxed into sound: at first, tentatively; then, with greater conviction. When the symphony rises, I stand back and listen, they stand up and sing a celestial sonata, it swells and subsides like some hyperventilating beast, like some unrelenting explosion, sweet and keening in my ears, and night is a different color— And everyone says yes. Be here with us. We hear and speak with you.

III. AFTER

In forty years we'll all have Whitman beards and publish chapbooks on weekends and read lines from the young blood. I will remember the gift of a hotel ballroom near empty, save the voices of friends welling over a single bag of grapes and holding the world at bay. Poets I have known will rise in me, bread-bubbled, sugar-stirred, steeping. I'll be a psychic tear in space.

I will give thanks for the poem, I will give thanks for the intention it brought to my hands, I will give thanks for the way it asked me to touch the world.

I will write until there are no more war songs left to write.

I will follow them into other countries for I do not fear the edge of the page.

I will go a long way into the past, I will look to see the future's mighty grasshopper, I'll glance to see the space his legs just left, and listen for a future sound.

When the extraterrestrials come, I will welcome them with open arms.

I will speak and I will listen until I forget how to speak, how to listen. And if this happens, I will learn to be again from all of you here with me.
Community Service Projects

Each year, the National Student Poets act as youth poetry ambassadors, spreading poetry to new communities through their community service projects, which include events such as national poetry conferences, workshops, readings, and festivals.

Collected here is the full list of previous National Student Poet Community Service Projects, including their partners, locations, goals, and achievements.

CLASS OF 2012

Luisa Banchoff (Southeast)
Partner: Red Mountain Writing Project in Birmingham, AL
Project: Collaborating with the Project on student and teacher workshops, focused on the power of words in affecting change, to honor the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Movement.

Miles Hewitt (West)
Partner: Washington State University Vancouver’s at Home at School Program in Vancouver, WA
Project: Co-leading poetry workshops for homeless youth, organizing a day of poetry for a dozen elementary and middle-school students.

Claire Lee (Northeast)
Partner: East Harlem Tutorial Program in New York, NY
Project: Conducting a series of creative writing workshops for third and fourth- graders to help students strengthen their reading and writing skills.

Natalie Richardson (Midwest)
Partner: Louder Than a Bomb in Chicago, IL
Project: Connecting students and teachers to slam poetry and its community in her hometown of Chicago.

Lylla Younes (Southwest)
Partner: Director of the Santa Fe Indian School Spoken Word Program in Santa Fe, NM
Project: Conducting poetry workshops with middle and high school students focused on spoken word poetry.

CLASS OF 2013

Sojourner Ahebee (Midwest)
Partner: Local nursing home in Interlochen, MI
Project: Working with Alzheimer’s patients via poetry. Through poetry, the residents of the local nursing home were able to have a conversation about memory and their fear of forgetting.

Michaela Coplen (Northeast)
Partner: Military advocacy group Blue Star Families; Joining Forces meeting in Washington, D.C., with Michelle Obama and Jill Biden; volunteer organization Points of Light
Project: Working to bring poetry to the military community and bring their voices into poetry.

Nathan Cummings (West)
Partner: Seattle Children’s Hospital and Writers in the Schools Program in Seattle, WA
Project: Assisting in the creation of a poetry celebration event in April and a collaborative poem with hospitalized chil-
dren, joined by Washington State’s newly elected poet laureate, Elizabeth Austen.

**Aline Dolinh (Southeast)**  
**Partner:** Local middle and high schools in VA  
**Project:** Conducting workshops with ESOL students, teaching poetry as a form of self-expression and communication.

**Louis Lafair (Southwest)**  
**Partner:** The National Writing Project, online  
**Project:** Working specifically with teachers, focusing on the art of teaching poetry; creating an online website for poetry resources for teachers and students; facilitating online webinars about poetry in the 21st Century.

**CLASS OF 2014**

**Weston Clark (Midwest)**  
**Partner:** The Turtle Mountain Teen Arts and Writing Program in ND  
**Project:** Workshopping poetry and sharing its power to represent and preserve culture with Native American teens.

**Julia Falkner (West)**  
**Partner:** Rainbow Alley and Out Boulder in Boulder, CO  
**Project:** Designing and implementing a workshop series that specifically catered to young LGBT+ artists and narratives in order to share poetry that sees, recognizes, and represents LGBT+ youth.

**Ashley Gong (Northeast)**  
**Partner:** Cyrenius H. Booth Library in Newton, CT  
**Project:** Creating “Writing Po(we)rtry,” a series of weekly workshops for students in grades 5–9, to reflect on and respond to the Sandy Hook Elementary shootings and tragedy in an effort to heal and move forward.

**Madeleine LeCesne (Southwest)**  
**Partner:** Her local Scholastic Art & Writing Awards affiliate in Southeast Louisiana; the Greater New Orleans Writing Project  
**Project:** Designing a series of workshops that focused on poetry as a means of finding and defining home.

**Cameron Messinides (Southeast)**  
**Partner:** White Horse Academy in Greenville, SC  
**Project:** Conducting poetry workshops with at-risk teenage boys to make poetry accessible as well as an outlet for self-expression.

**CLASS OF 2015**

**Chasity Hale (Southeast)**  
**Partner:** Girl Power Rocks; The Betsy Hotel; and South Florida CARES Mentoring Movement in Florida  
**Project:** Presenting poetry workshops to girls in a STEAM program, providing a platform for writing about the changes these young girls wanted to see in their community.

**De’John Hardges (Midwest)**  
**Partner:** Cleveland Public Library in Cleveland, OH  
**Project:** Working with his poetry group to spread his literary journal’s message and voice throughout his community, and conducting workshops with high school students focusing on poetry and the power of hip-hop.

**Eileen Huang (Northeast)**  
**Partner:** Project Write Now, an organization in New Jersey  
**Project:** Holding creative writing workshops for middle-school students, creating prompts and starting discussions about the social commentary and technical aspects found in a variety of poems.

**Anna Lance (West)**  
**Partner:** Public schools in Missoula and Billings, MT  
**Project:** Working with young girls in order to speak out and express themselves, making their voices known, through poetry.

**David Xiang (Southwest)**  
**Partner:** Veterans’ Centers in Norman and Lawton, OK  
**Project:** Sharing the healing and reflective power of poetry, conducting poetry workshops with veterans, and working with one veteran to turn her poem into a hymn, which had been her life-long dream.
Classes of 2012–15 Where Are They Now?

The alums of the National Student Poets Program, Classes 2012–15, continue to keep poetry and the Program in their hearts and minds. Here, in their own words, are their biographies, with updates on their current whereabouts, activities, and accomplishments.

CLASS OF 2012

Luisa Banchoff studies religion at Princeton University, where she is also pursuing a certificate in creative writing. Her lifelong passion for storytelling, combined with the leadership skills fostered by the National Student Poets Program, have emboldened her to pursue new creative projects in college. She is currently conducting research on the nature of interfaith dialogue in Berlin, Germany.

Raised in the margins of the unknown Vancouver, WA, Miles Hewitt went east to study at the toes of the masters. Currently, he’s on leave from Harvard while pursuing his interests: rock n’ roll martyrdom, diplomacy, and enlightenment. Miles lives, writes, and records his songs and poems in Allston, MA.

A proud New Yorker, Claire Lee is a Korean-American who has remained connected to the Program by conducting interviews with the Class of 2013 National Student Poets, which have been featured on the Scholastic Awards blog. Claire continues to pursue her passion for writing by writing for the Harvard Crimson and working as a mentor for the Harvard College Writing Program’s College-Bound Mentorship Program.

Natalie Richardson attends the University of Chicago and is a recipient of a 2016 Davis Projects for Peace Grant. She was awarded a Dunn Research Prize, a Seidel Scholar PRISM Grant, and the Margaret C. Annan Memorial Prize in poetry from the University of Chicago. Natalie has partnered with Young Chicago Authors, The Rebuild Foundation, and the Poetry Foundation to lead a large-scale arts initiative project (starring poetry) in Chicago.

Lylla Younes is a rising senior at Cornell University, where she studies computer science and comparative literature. Still writing poetry, she is currently interested in literary translation and spoken word. After she graduates, Lylla hopes to work at the intersection of technology and journalism, creating data-driven stories with information visualization.

CLASS OF 2013

Sojourner Ahébée, born in Cote d’Ivoire, West Africa, is currently an undergraduate at Stanford University. She is pursuing studies in the African diaspora, comparative literature, and film. Her poetry has been published in Winter Tangerine Review, The Atlantic (online content), The Academy of American Poets: Poem A Day, Talking River Review, The Stanford Arts Review, and two forthcoming poems in West Magazine (Stanford University) and Prairie Schooner.
Set to graduate from Vassar in 2018, Michaela Coplen is an International Studies major, with minors in Arabic Language & Culture and Poetry & Poetics. Her work with military families won her a Point of Light award, and saw her returning to the White House in September of 2014 to address the new class of National Student Poets at their appointment ceremony.

A Harvard junior, Nathan Cummings discovered poetry while searching for entertainment during a rainy day in his hometown of Seattle and has been hooked ever since. As a reporter for the Harvard Crimson, he explores the world of journalism while maintaining his love for creative writing.

Aline Dolinh is currently a first-year student at the University of Virginia, where she hopes to major in history and comparative literature. Her other interests include scriptwriting and acting, and she hopes to pen an independent, female-driven horror film.

Louis Lafair founded the annual TEDxYouth@Austin conference. Before attending Stanford, he launched the website Poetry 2.0 (poetry2point0.com), which "compiles new ways to experience poetry in the 21st century." Now he works at the Stanford Storytelling Project where he produces their "State of the Human" podcast and will spend a quarter abroad at Oxford University to focus on writing.

CLASS OF 2014
Weston Clark is having a hard time dealing with the dramatic lack of fame since his sophomore year stint as a National Student Poet. Now a senior in high school, he spends much of his time sitting in the corners of cafes with a stack of chapbooks and a ballpoint pen, waiting for someone to recognize him.

Julia Falkner is now a rising sophomore at Smith College studying neuroscience and poetry. Her writing and note-taking involves more colors, farm animals, and street lamps. In the fall, she will sign on as a core intern of the Poetry Center at Smith College under director Ellen Doré Watson.

Ashley Gong is a rising freshman at Harvard University, where she plans to study English. When not writing, she serves as Poetry Editor for Persephone’s Daughters, a national literary magazine dedicated to empowering women in places of abuse.

Madeleine LeCesne is from New Orleans, LA. She is currently a sophomore at Princeton University, where she studies creative writing and African American studies. From 2015-16, Madeleine served as a Civic Practice Scholar with the Aspen Institute. She cannot stop writing about deer.

Cameron Messinides is a sophomore at Kenyon College, where he is a prospective American Studies major. He works as an associate with the Kenyon Review and serves as Sports Editor for the Kenyon Collegian. A staunch Southerner, he lives in perpetual fear of the next Great White Midwestern Winter.

CLASS OF 2015
Chasity Hale is a senior and creative writing major at Miami Arts Charter School. She won first place in the Sarah Mook poetry contest, received an honorable mention in the Nancy Thorp poetry contest, and has been published by Creative Communications, Susquehanna University, the Young American Poetry Digest, and American Poetry Review.

De’John Hardges is a senior at Cleveland School of The Arts, majoring in Literary Arts with an emphasis on poetry. When he isn’t studying for classes or performing, he works as a community organizer for the New Abolitionists Association.

Now a junior at High Technology High School in New Jersey, Eileen Huang grew up with both STEM and literary influences. During her year as a National Student Poet, she was invited to speak at events with venues ranging from Lincoln Center to a TEDx stage. She believes that poetry has the power to connect and unite others, and that there is still a space for words and language in a silicon world.

Anna Lance is a freshman at Yale University and has been writing poetry for as long as she can remember. Her work is largely personal in nature. Anna was published in Aerie International, a global poetry journal based in Big Sky High School of Missoula, Montana, in summer 2016.

David Xiang is currently a freshman at Harvard University, and not yet sure what his major will be. Being a National Student Poet has been one of the most transformative experiences of his life. David writes, “NSPP has reminded me of why I love to write, and of why poetry will always have a special place in my heart.”
Biographies: National Student Poets Program Jurors

A national jury of literary luminaries and leaders in education and the arts selects the five National Student Poets. Submissions are evaluated based on the National Student Poets Program’s three criteria: creativity, dedication to craft, and promise.

The Program Jurors range from best-selling authors to U.S. Poet Laureates, from famous actors and activists to inaugural poets. Here are their biographies.

Kwame Alexander is an American writer of poetry and children’s fiction. His book *The Crossover* won the 2015 Newbery Medal recognizing the year’s “most distinguished contribution to American literature for children.” His book *Acoustic Rooster and His Barnyard Band* was selected for the 2014 Michigan Reads! One State, One Children’s Book program.

Esther Belin, a writer and multimedia artist, won the American Book Award for her first book of poetry, *From the Belly of My Beauty*. Recent installation work includes *Standing on the Outside, Sitting on the Outside, Binding Sky*, and *Pretty Tough*.

Jennifer Benka is the Executive Director of the Academy of American Poets and the author of *Pinko* (Hanging Loose Press, 2011) and *A Box of Longing with Fifty Drawers* (Soft Skull Press, 2005).

Richard Blanco’s acclaimed first book of poetry, *City of a Hundred Fires*, received the Agnes Lynch Starrett Poetry Prize from the University of Pittsburgh Press. His second book, *Directions to the Beach of the Dead*, won the Beyond Margins Award from the PEN American Center. In January 2013, Blanco was selected by President Obama to be the inaugural poet.

Robert Casper is the head of the Poetry and Literature Center at the Library of Congress. He is one of the founders of the literary magazine *jubilat*, and he served as its publisher for more than a decade. He also served as the poetry chair for the Brooklyn Borough President’s Literary Council and on the board for the Council of Literary Magazines and Presses.

Michael Earl Craig is an American poet from Livingston, MT. Craig is the author of *Can You Relax in My House*, *Thin Kimono*, and *Yes, Master*. He was appointed the Montana Poet Laureate in October 2015.

Mayda del Valle is a Latin-American artist from Chicago, who was chosen to represent the poetry community at the first White House poetry event in May 2009. She was part of the original Broadway cast of the Tony Award-winning *Def Poetry Jam* and was chosen as one of the first 20 women on Oprah’s “O Power List.” de Valle has been featured in many publications, including *The New York Times*.
Biographies: National Student Poets Program Jurors

Toi Derricotte, a poet and a professor of writing at University of Pittsburgh, co-founded Cave Canem Foundation with Cornelius Eady. She won a 2012 PEN/Voelcker Award for Poetry. She has received the Lucille Medwick Memorial Award from the Poetry Society of America, the Distinguished Pioneering of the Arts Award from the United Black Artists, two Pushcart Prizes, and numerous fellowships.

Martin Jude Farawell directs the Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival and Poetry Program. He is the author of *Genesis: A Sequence of Poems*, and his work has appeared in the *Cortland Review*, *Literary Review*, *Poetry East*, *Southern Review*, and a number of anthologies, including *Outsiders: Poems About Rebels, Exiles, and Renegades* (Milkweed Editions).

Carolyn Forché is a poet, teacher, and activist whose books of poetry include *The Angel of History*, which received the Los Angeles Times Book Award; *The Country Between Us*, a Lamont Poetry Selection of the Academy of American Poets; and *Gathering the Tribes*, selected for the Yale Series of Younger Poets by Stanley Kunitz.

Andrea Gibson’s poetry has been featured on media outlets such as the BBC and CNN, among others. She has released five spoken word albums and was the first winner of the Women of the World Poetry Slam.

Kimiko Hahn is the author of eight books of poems, including *The Unbearable Heart* (Kaya, 1996), which received an American Book Award; *The Narrow Road to the Interior* (W.W. Norton, 2006), a collection that takes its title from Basho’s famous poetic journal; and *Toxic Flora* (W.W. Norton, 2010), poems inspired by science. Her most recent honor is a Guggenheim Fellowship.

Joy Harjo is a member of the Mvskoke Nation. She has released four award-winning CDs of original music and won a Native American Music Award (NAMMY) for Best Female Artist of the Year. She has appeared on HBO’s *Def Poetry Jam*. Her seven books of poetry include *How We Became Human: New and Selected Poems* and *She Had Some Horses*.

Terrance Hayes is the author of *Lighthead*, winner of the 2010 National Book Award for Poetry. His other collections are *Wind in a Box*, *Hip Logic*, and *Muscular Music*. Other honors include a Whiting Writers Award, a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, a United States Artists Zell Fellowship, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and a MacArthur fellowship.

Juan Felipe Herrera is a poet, novelist, and the Poet Laureate of the United States whose recent awards for poetry include a Guggenheim Fellowship, the National Book Critics’ Circle Award, and the Latino International Award. He is a member of the Board of Chancellors of the Academy of American Poetry.

Edward Hirsch, a MacArthur Fellow, has published *The Living Fire: New and Selected Poems*, which brings together 35 years of poetry from seven previous collections. He has also written five prose books, including *How to Read a Poem and Fall in Love with Poetry*, a national bestseller. He now serves as president of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.

James Kass is the founder and executive director of Youth Speaks. Kass created the Brave New Voices International Youth Poetry Slam Festival in 1998 and helped launch more than 44 spoken word programs across the country, including co-founding Youth Speaks NY in 1999 (now called Urban Word NYC).

David Lynn is the editor of *The Kenyon Review* and also a fiction writer and essayist. He wrote the novel *Wrestling with Gabriel* and the critical study *The Hero’s Tale: Narrators in the Early Modern Novel*, as well as other books.

Alice Quinn was the poetry editor at Alfred A. Knopf from 1976 to 1986 and then became the poetry editor of *The New Yorker*. She is the executive director of the Poetry Society of America. She has written and edited several books, including *Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box: Uncollected Poems, Drafts, and Fragments*.

Glenis Redmond is an esteemed Cave Canem Fellow and currently serves as the Poet-in-Residence at the Peace Center for the Performing Arts. She is a Kennedy Center Teaching Artist and a full-time road poet. In 1996, she founded the Asheville Poetry Slam and the Greenville Poetry Slam.
Roger Reeves was awarded a 2013 National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellowship, a 2008 Ruth Lilly Fellowship, and the 2014 Pushcart Prize. *King Me*, his first book of poems, was published by Copper Canyon Press in 2013.

Naomi Shihab Nye has won numerous awards and fellowships, among them four Pushcart Prizes, the Paterson Poetry Prize, and a 2000 Witter Bynner Fellowship. Her books include poetry collections *19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East*, *A Maze Me, Red Suitcase, Field Trip*, and *Fuel*.

Patricia Smith, a 2014 Guggenheim Poetry fellow, is the author of six volumes of poetry, including: *Shoulda Been Jimi Savannah*, winner of the 2013 Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize from the Academy of American Poets and finalist for the William Carlos Williams Award from the Poetry Society of America; *Blood Dazzler*, a National Book Award finalist; and *Teahouse of the Almighty*, a National Poetry Series winner.

Rose Styron is a poet, journalist, and human rights activist. She has published three volumes of poetry—*From Summer to Summer* (Viking, 1965), *Thieves’ Afternoon* (Viking, 1972), and *By Vineyard Light* (Rizzoli, 1995)—and collaborated in translations from Russian (*Modern Russian Poetry* and *Poets on Street Corners*, both Viking Press).

Jeff Tweedy is an American songwriter, musician, and leader of the band Wilco, which has produced 10 studio albums and won multiple Grammy Awards. Wilco’s 2002 album, *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*, has been widely heralded as one of the greatest pop albums of the last decade. In addition to his work with Wilco, Tweedy won a Grammy Award in 2011 for his work with legendary soul and gospel singer Mavis Staples.

Kerry Washington is an award-winning actress. In 2005, Americans for the Arts presented her with the Young Artist Award for artistic accomplishments and exemplary leadership. In 2008, she was awarded the Phoenix Award for commitment to social advocacy from the Congressional Black Caucus. In 2009, Washington received the Artist-Citizen Award for public leadership in the arts from the U.S. Conference. She was appointed by President Barack Obama to the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities in 2009.


Jacqueline Woodson is an American writer of books for children and adolescents. She is best known for *Miracle’s Boys*, which won the Coretta Scott King Award in 2001, and her Newbery Honor-winning titles *Brown Girl Dreaming*, *After Tupac & D Foster*, *Feathers*, and *Show Way*. 
The 5th Anniversary Reflection is dedicated to the incredibly talented and generous poets who paved the way for the National Student Poets Program’s success. We thank you for rallying behind the cause of youth poetry ambassadorship by advising, mentoring, and supporting each Class of National Student Poets through myriad workshops, conferences, and readings on the world’s greatest stages.