

## About the National Student Poets Program

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.

[artandwriting.org/NSPP](http://artandwriting.org/NSPP)

[facebook.com/NationalStudentPoetsProgram](https://facebook.com/NationalStudentPoetsProgram)

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Eligibility

## Letter from the National Student Poets Program Partners

We are delighted to join Librarian of Congress Dr. Carla Hayden in congratulating the Class of 2017 on receiving the nation's highest honor for youth poets. Over the past six years, the National Student Poets Program has created a legacy of our country's most promising young poets, by providing each class with resources to develop their skills as poets, and supporting them as ambassadors who engage and inspire young and old alike.

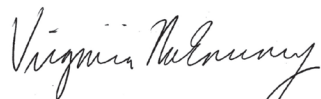
Class after class of poets fulfill their charge as youth poetry ambassadors through events and service projects that change the trajectory of each poet's life and touch the lives of hundreds of young people. They reach kids who have never before met a poet their age, they advocate for poetry in their schools and communities, and they grow as poets and as leaders.

As partners in carrying out the National Student Poets Program, the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (PCAH), the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), and the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers seek to recognize and nurture the talents of young people so as to sustain our nation's cultural life. We are therefore proud to share a sample of their work in this small volume.

Congratulations to these five outstanding poets! We applaud the creativity and genius of America's youth.



**John Abodeely**, Acting Executive Director  
President's Committee on the Arts  
and the Humanities



**Virginia McEnerney**, Executive Director  
Alliance for Young Artists & Writers



**Dr. Kathryn K. Matthew**, Director  
Institute of Museum and Library Services

“If lightning could write, it would pour down through the minds and hands of these fiery National Student Poets. What I mean is that I can feel the intensity of their innermost lives at work—their sky-breaking defiance and their elegant philosophical queries, all line by line in their poetry.”

—**Juan Felipe Herrera**, U.S. Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry, 2015–17, and National Student Poets Program Juror

We are grateful to our Jurors for their support of youth poetry in America.

### Past Jurors

Kwame Alexander  
Esther Belin  
Robert Casper  
Michael Earl Craig  
Mayda Del Valle  
Toi Derricotte  
Martin Jude Farawell  
Carolyn Forché  
Andrea Gibson  
Kimiko Hahn  
Joy Harjo  
Terrance Hayes  
David Lynn  
Glenis Redmond  
Roger Reeves  
Naomi Shihab Nye  
Patricia Smith

Rose Styron  
Jeff Tweedy  
Kerry Washington  
Alfre Woodard  
Jacqueline Woodson

### 2017 Jurors

Jennifer Benka\*  
Richard Blanco\*  
Ann Burg  
Kyle Dargan  
Juan Felipe Herrera\*  
Edward Hirsch\*  
Rickey Laurentis  
Robin Coste Lewis  
Marilyn Nelson  
Alice Quinn\*

\* Indicates repeat jurors



# Annie Castillo

**Age 16; Falls Church, VA; Southeast Region**

Annie Castillo began writing poetry as a remedy for sleepless nights. Now she writes, edits, and reads it whenever possible. Her work dissects the complexity of adolescence along with self-discovery, gender, and nature. Some of Annie's favorite companions in poetry include Edna St. Vincent Millay, Ocean Vuong, Billy Collins, and Linda Pastan. Annie has discovered and built a rich community in poetry workshops and seminars online and at places like the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C., where she read and wrote poetry as part of "Shakespeare's Sisters." Annie is working to spread her love of poetry by starting a poetry workshop at the middle school in Falls Church, VA. When she isn't writing, Annie can be found hiking, playing volleyball, reading, and trying to instill a love for etymologies in anyone who will listen.

Favorite museum: Smithsonian Museum of Natural History

Favorite library: Mary Riley Styles Library in Falls Church, VA

## On the Discovery of Dinosaurs

I dream of a phantom femur far below, pale  
as puddled moonbeams on a chapel's roof.  
The beast became bones, time shucking scales  
from its body, sinew dissolving into clumps  
of stringy roots. The earth is now a crypt.

A dragon's tail, perhaps, were the murmurs,  
Or a giant's skeleton.

Ribcages emerged in vast, hollowed chambers  
like a cathedral's arch, then teeth came next.

O God, what is this creature,  
whispered like a prayer.

A man can sleep in the jawbone's hinges.

I used to think of the dinosaurs who  
became bones and shadow.

Now I think of the ones who  
unearthed the bones

so time's raw sunlight could touch those ghosts.

**For Vincent:****On Edna St. Vincent Millay**

Reborn, I'm thinking, revival.  
 Your attic's shadows flicker against  
 my eyelids like a breath so they tremble.  
 Words flooded blank white like moonlight's  
 puddles through the window, and I'm thinking  
 of a house tucked away, like a lilac  
 crumpled between the pages of a book.  
 Before you, words were stale bread  
 hardened in my hands—  
 enough to eat, but bitter on my tongue.  
 Besides that, I'm thinking that people forget  
 your red hair in the black-and-white.  
 You pose with magnolias in Mamaroneck,  
 so close that an unfurled flower could touch your flame.

**Church**

Charity chewed Bazooka bubblegum beneath the awning of  
 a decrepit church tucked discreetly into a city block. We never went in, only sat to  
 escape

catcalls or car exhaust or a crack of lightning once or so a week.

I listened for the rhythmic smack, smack, smack of her lips & the echo  
 of the preacher talking. Days ago we'd sat & laughed as the children's choir butchered  
 a hymn.

Now it was quiet, only one clear voice coming through the stacked chimney.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven...

I cocked my head to listen. The words left chapped lips gently.

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive  
 our debtors.

Charity swallowed her chewing gum & took out a cigarette.

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil ...

Her fingers flicked at her lighter in a practiced motion.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

My hands reached to knock it away, to hold her gaze firmly.

You can't smoke at church, I snapped, A funeral. Have some respect for the dead.  
 She pocketed it quickly, brushed her hair aside for something to do. A vein jumped at  
 her temple.

The procession filed out across the parking lot, casket resting on trembling shoulders.  
 The mourners clicked their lights on & drove away slowly. In a trance, I watched.

From the porch my eye caught the silhouette of a bluebird.

It perched on the rear-view mirror of a parked car, pecking its own reflection away.



# Kinsale Hueston

**Age 17; Corona Del Mar, CA; West Region**

Kinsale Hueston is a rising senior at St. Margaret's Episcopal School in San Juan Capistrano, CA, where she is the founder and president of the Native American Culture Club, a tutor and member of the Spanish National Honors Society, and a student leader in TIDE, her school's diversity education group. An enrolled member of the Navajo Nation, Kinsale focuses her work on modern issues facing her tribe, including violence against women, the loss of native languages, exploitation of resources, and racial prejudice. She is actively involved as an intern for the Navajo Nation Department of Justice. Recently, for her high school she organized a service trip to her reservation during their spring break. Kinsale draws inspiration from many of her favorite writers, including Louise Erdrich, Toni Morrison, and Emily Dickinson. In her free time, Kinsale enjoys playing lacrosse on her school's varsity team, acting in original native plays that seek to raise awareness of contemporary social justice issues, and crafting ukulele mixtapes with friends.

Favorite museum: Autry Museum of the American West in Los Angeles, CA  
 Favorite library: Newport Beach Public Library

## Where I Come From (1992)

Sticky peach overpowers muggy bug-infested sky,  
 Backwater, drainpipe fodder colonial house with ravine shade.  
 Plantation homes embody black backs bleeding ghost stories,  
 Gravestone front doors knock in empty Alabama vacuum-space.

White boy, Brooklyn-born, pre-spiced-latté-infiltration,  
 Interracial hands entwined in reed-pipe marriage basket, Caucasian  
 Curls breathe in Navajo bandana. Oldest of five holler-boys, grandsons  
 To Ellis Island Campbells. Father gone, single mom, washed himself to Irish bones.

Preacher's daughter, beloved father, basketball fanatic,  
 Valedictorian-tinted glasses threaten not even stepping off red sand  
 Front porch, good-enough-for-reservation pulls at sinking canyon feet,  
 Smoky sage tracks lonesome wind-calls after her Hanover-bound plane.

Southern discomfort in sideways glances, recoiled fingers  
 Dropping penny-change in chubby multicolored hands.  
 My brother, civil-rights-rally namesake, sucking sweetwater  
 Montgomery air, my sister old enough to sniff out powdered sugar bigotry.

**Four Letter Words**

My fingers, sticky and blue  
 with Popsicle juice so artificial  
 it makes my father laugh, leave cyan marks  
 like watery suction kisses on my dress.

Navajos wear two rugs  
 sewn together by chapped brown fingers,  
 with a head-hole wide enough for my shoulders,  
 two embryotic pennycresses,  
 to poke through.

My mother, sweatpants evaporated,  
 drags fibers through my hair.  
 A weaver seated before her rug-making frame,  
 knees cracking like old rocks as she threads  
 white yarn with feminine dexterity. I never liked  
 my cowlicks curled like yucca bark,  
 reaching towards my mother's fingers,  
 mixed blood sustaining my indecisive follicles'  
 hungry, grasping gravitropism.

Shifting among girls with hair as slick as grease  
 cooled under smoky bubbles,  
 I wear a crown of warning-lights, of stop sign  
 rubies thick as wool. Coral-colored confidence  
 melts to a murmur of maroon, blood buzzing  
 at my sugared fingertips, startled from its steady thrum.

Because somehow here, I am not small,  
 a wax figure behind one-way silver glass,  
 Sac-uh-ja-wee-uh frothing from spectator lips crusted  
 with store-bought ignorance.  
 But also, somehow,  
 even on this reservation,  
 here I am not enough.

Here I am fourteen  
 and smiling as he sees me,  
 stops,  
 teeters toward me in liquor-laced laughter,  
 chokes, Half-breed through his leather gums.

Here fibers slice my fingernails,  
 hooked tongues lap at my uncertain skin,  
 girls with plaits like stovetop grease  
 steal sideways glances at my hybrid hair.

My mother's weaver hands trace my own, but even she  
 can't soothe the sheepish bees  
 colliding underneath my neon skin.



# Ben Lee

**Age 16; Edina, MN; Midwest Region**

Ben Lee is a rising junior at The Blake School in downtown Minneapolis. As a first generation American on his father's side, Ben's poetry is often inspired by his Korean and Canadian heritage, Midwest roots, and his childhood memories living on the northern shore of Lake Superior and southwest of the Twin Cities. He explains his love for poetry as a necessity to reconcile his thoughts and emotions with his surroundings, a love that leads to a greater understanding of his current self and environs. Ben is also a member of two varsity sports, two vocal ensembles, and the student council at his high school. In 2015, the Minnesota Reading Association recognized Ben at the Writers are Readers awards for his poetry.

Favorite museum: Minneapolis Sculpture Garden, next to the Walker Art Center

Favorite library: Minneapolis Central Library

## Six Steps to Nihilism

1

2

3

6

4

5

1. It's not like you / to count the number of veins beneath your forearm,  
as if the ones on your left wing had swum away while you were studying  
the ones on your right. / Isn't it odd? / How your gasping knuckles  
can extract every sensation from your naked elbow except / surprise. /  
Until your mercury eyes can / see nothing / but themselves, do not authorize  
the excavation of your poignant shoulder blades, like the / way we used /  
to fold over waveless basalts on the / northern shore. / There is no need

2. to hurl your / memories / over the saltless buttresses of our assembly.  
As if the unwrinkled agates we / lost in the waves / could have somehow / healed /  
the cobalt chasms that you washed upon your toenails. Just sing me the score  
that was so alluring to your ear, / so that I might cast down the notes into a cradle  
of indigo / & leave them there to hunt. Every / dark chocolate tear / that tumbles  
over the ashen rock allows your / perceived wholeness to plummet / onto my bones,  
who choose not to feel

3. remorse. I remember what it felt like to / weed through raspberry / bushes &  
perceive your perfume, / climbing up / my spine like a ladder. The pluck of vermilion  
fingers ceased to scatter the / vermin / from chivalrous shrubbery when you / realized  
/ that there were some things / you could not be. / Do you remember?—When the /  
sound of sweetness pulled / at the edges of your tongue until the lump in your throat  
became / tangible enough to take. / Taste is but a number, / branded / upon the  
recipe book of

4. history. & when / mantles of charcoal began to drain / themselves upon the sink  
of our land, you always / ran slowest. / As if the hemorrhaging sky was your / unlocked /  
jaw, emptying a plea of laughter at our / back door, / so that I might turn my head &  
/ wait for you. / Still giggling, you draped a thick bath towel over your dripping hair

& shook yourself into a / cosmic phantom of nothingness. / I should have told you  
to be cautious of your / reflection in the cotton / anemone, so only I could cultivate

5. fear. Your cloud-kissed nose calculated each quaver, while wistful atoms zipped  
underneath your sleeve to / escape the engulfing / water beyond / numbly / stained glass.  
Do not be afraid of the lighthouse at the end of the / bite that is camouflaged in  
viridescent flames. / & disregard the solipsist next door who cannot see himself in  
the / frame / of a mirror, for he cannot be his own god & / God is not dead. / Cure your  
cynicism once you have / journeyed your way back / to the shoreline, & found still-  
fresh pieces of your grit within the / leeches / that sit below saffron algae. & we will  
perch ourselves atop small mountains, / wondering why we had to travel so far / to  
finally hear

6. the hum of a poet.

### Corner Store Cherry Bombs

Then, like a bouquet of purple voices,  
I strung myself to our honest photographs  
on the water-stained wall and let myself listen  
to the warm, waning sizzle of forgiveness.  
My bronze fingers rang against the spineless railing  
like bells until I caught your plastered shadow, perpetuating

our silent spectatorship, so corruptly perpetuating  
the incredible stillness that paralyzed our voices  
until we became too insignificant to become photographs.  
I wish I hadn't jolted so rhythmically as we listened  
to the windstorm of words colliding below us. Forgive  
me for throwing my anxious ears too close to the railing,

and committing you to another trial that made you rail  
so nobly against the turntable of your adolescence. Perpetually  
bubbling up from the seams of cherry floorboards were the voices  
that looked to pry away the arresting photographs  
from next year. Have you ever stopped and listened

to that moment?—When your pale breath did not forgive

itself for wanting more than the stale forgiveness  
of the unashamedly callused insides of remised railings.  
Brazen sunspots southwest of my left cheekbone perpetuated  
the belief that we became more than a decision to powder voices  
when our eyes grew incapable of perceiving abashed photographs  
of halved caramels. On the day that our rubber ankles began to listen

to tongue grenades, our noses pioneered an escape plan. But listening  
folded us over until our pulses paddled into the riptide and never forgave  
us for the jaded mistakes that racked against the rails  
of a meaningless warscape that could not help but perpetuate  
a raw desire to remember the refrain of our voices  
against the thrum of the Midwest torrent that we could not photograph.

What do you say we go out and unearth ourselves in a photographer?  
And we will wait for the morning mockingbirds to rekindle and listen  
to our boisterous harmonies in windowless car rides that will forgive  
the obtuseness of time that entrapped us into those brittle railings.  
Let's unclip our shoelaces from the roots of denim shutters and perpetuate  
the crack of nostalgia upon the soft pavement. Soon, the voices,

the firebrick voices, will find enough sunlight to photograph  
us as we listen to the forgiving explosions of laughter  
beyond our railings, in a motion so effortlessly perpetual.





# Juliet Lubwama

**Age 17; Downingtown, PA; Northeast Region**

Juliet Lubwama is a rising senior at the Downingtown STEM Academy. While she hopes to be a neurologist in the future, she has found ways to surround herself with words in every aspect of her life, whether she is writing, singing, or speaking. She believes poems can build bridges between cultures, beliefs, and people, helping them empathize with each other. As the daughter of Ugandan immigrants, Juliet's poetry often revolves around family, heritage, and identity. She takes inspiration from poets such as Maya Angelou, Chen Chen, and Langston Hughes to face her emotions and make sense of them on the page. She is passionate about mental illness advocacy and is captain of her school's speech and debate team, where she performs oral interpretations of poetry and prose.

Favorite museum: Philadelphia Museum of Art

Favorite library: Free Library of Philadelphia

## Harlem: A Snapshot

My father bought me a camera  
for my fourteenth birthday  
Told me,  
“Don't go using up its memory”  
And I said to him that I wouldn't  
since I knew of no moments worth an eternity,  
not yet

But I still carried that camera with me  
through sun-deprived streets never granted the glory of a suitable snapshot  
and let dust settle on the shutter  
Sat on the curb, writing in my journal,  
'cause words could convey so much more than a Kodak, so  
I was writing a poem  
when I saw a man standing cold just a few feet away, folded into himself  
His hair, his hands, stretching to the sky,  
he looked a little something like my father.  
I took out my camera,  
put an eye to the lens and a finger to the dial—

I didn't know the camera had clicked  
until I heard the gunfire

There was a man inside my memory card  
His back was broken and bruised and bent,  
it looked like wings were ready to spring from his shoulder blades  
His kinky hair haloed his head like a crown, too much  
like my father's  
open mouth, telling me—don't go using up its memory—  
smothered by my camera's flash

a ruined man inside my camera,  
captured in a moment

I kissed my father

I disposed of the photo

and I kept my pen's ink flowing  
'cause the man had no fancy for a photograph

### Trying To Find Home

my parents crossed the ocean  
cracking Kant's and Locke's philosophies  
between their teeth like walnuts. western learned  
but foreign, in how they hold themselves,  
like waterlogged apples dangling by the stem.  
finding unexpected asylum with strangers,  
the familiar lilts in their tones. carving homes  
out of each other. but when a cousin questions  
where I'm from, my tongue  
becomes a salmon, pink and floundering.  
as if an answer could be found in a lifetime.  
my family tree is worn and trampled,  
sieged by storms, by dictators, by slavery.  
my kin arrived with textbooks swaying on their heads  
and shackles round their ankles.  
still, in a land we have yet to call home,  
our neighbors see our cacao hands,  
whether they be doused in blood or salt water.  
  
even this can become a sanctuary.

### Good Hair

auntie is a force to be reckoned with  
auntie tugs hot comb through hair as if tearing out heritage  
rests my head on her knee at a forty-five degree angle  
as she turns unmanageable, imperfect, into adequate,  
coconut-stained coils into cigarette strands  
veiled between her fingers,  
the ritual of Straightening,  
Bobby Pinning,  
six-year-old me Grinning at her reflection,  
for once

becoming auntie is an art of adjustment—  
sleek hair like oil spill over shoulders,  
coinciding cultures handled with ease,  
an impeccable representation of what black girl should be  
and yet (unafraid to walk through screen of rain with fresh-permed hair,  
if only for a moment,  
if only to perm hair again once back in her apartment)  
auntie is indecipherable

auntie knows the pain of dazed identity, unspeakable,  
shelters tips of ears to keep the heat  
from singeing skin



# Camila Sanmiguel

**Age 17; Laredo, TX; Southwest Region**

For Camila Sanmiguel, language is the most beautiful part of life. She sees poetry as a way to appeal to human emotions and to understand diverse groups of people. Camila believes that a writer's most valuable resources are the insight into one's personal experiences and the ability to empathize with others. Aside from writing poetry, Camila is the founder and president of her school's Model United Nations, and she also tutors at her high school's writing center, writes features for her school newspaper, and trains in flamenco. She is second-generation Mexican-American from South Texas.

Favorite museums: Austin's Mexican-American Cultural Center and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Favorite libraries: Houston Public Library and the Fort Worth Public Library

## Sunscreen

growing up a product of mexico, i am equipped

with the prayers of ladies that fold feathers of their souls into crumpled napkins,  
rest their dreams in grocery store bags, add them to a collection of

rosaries, pill boxes, an expired sam's card, eyelash curlers.  
they whisper their intentions with their eyes squeezed shut, as if

their prayers for rainfall at the ranch in nuevo leon are life and death,  
though they have been living in city tenements for fifty years and the cattle are  
long dead.

their prayers are for me, because my skin is the color of stems shooting up amidst  
snow during winter,  
my eyes small, my face misshapen. they come from a time when women prayed for  
beauty to attract husbands  
because these were the terms for survival.

the women haven't prayed for america in years.

they see it as a lost cause,  
because ever since the day they arrived, they have known nothing but intolerance

felt nothing but the fear of being a mexican in a country where they were criminalized  
and where it was not success they tasted on their tongues, but sweat in the heat of  
low wages

and today, mexican-americans have been supreme court justices,  
senators, entrepreneurs  
but somehow, we are still called 'beaners,' as if generations of work mean nothing.

they look at me, and i witness myself eroding into nothing in their eyes, molded into  
something new.

they look at me as if any second i might shed my entire self

and emerge a drop-out, a teenage pregnancy, another illegal,  
stealing jobs americans don't seem to care for; another waste of space ruining  
the economy,

another pulverized dream in a ziploc bag, manufactured by a family of narcos  
in coahuila  
for your consumption and my degradation.

in their eyes, i take many roles  
but none of them are anywhere near truth.

the women grimace when they pray, now. they finger the creases on their pictures  
of saints  
and wait for nightfall to wail into tissues because their lives are gone and their  
bodies, their  
bodies that still feel the weight of the hardest lives in what was supposed to be the  
land of the free, are

left aching.

**poetry is a sophisticated form of stealing: detainment and stagnation  
in four parts**

i.

I am on a media-diet of war-torn hellscapes  
tossed into the salad bowl of  
cooking recipes-makeup tutorials-status updates-music from the fever of  
urban nightclubs.  
Meanwhile we cut piles of documented death with constant argument and deception,  
operating behind the guise of “our citizens first”  
as it becomes more about winning an argument and less about human life  
more about gaining the most applause, than about the faces  
we were intended to welcome—  
faces people scratch and peel away from their social news feeds; we  
encapsulate war, dust it over with a filter and some empty thought  
jam everybody into the blender with a sprinkle of political capital and press MAX.  
Meanwhile, Syrian blood pulses beneath my skin  
and I sit in my nest of safety and calculus books.  
Back home, my sisters nest among rubble, shudders suspended within dust-coated air.

ii.

Manal and I used to spend our sixth-grade gym periods hiding in the locker room  
as she sniffled into toilet paper and I gawked at the black leggings her parents made  
her wear under her shorts.  
She carefully maintained a postured exterior so people would  
think she didn’t care, that she didn’t want to be anything other than what she was—  
glaring eyes beneath a hijab in a majority-white private school  
spewing profanity at anyone who stared too long. she was amalgamated discontent  
and every night she poured her soul into my able eleven-year-old hands  
until I asked if her marriage would be arranged too and heard the click of the receiver.  
I remember watching as she swung back and forth from rejecting her roots and strugg-  
ling to assimilate  
to rejecting our immoralities and swinging at anyone who dared speak a terrorist joke,  
and  
everyone knew that Manal hit hard. I remember this now, staring at

a distant night's IM conversation with her, years after she's returned to Pakistan,  
and I wonder if she is as happy as she seems to be. She says she's finally come to terms  
with her religion—loves it now, even. I envy the way she outgrew our teenage angst  
until she delivers one final  
full-knuckled blow to ignorance: she tells me that she cried  
when the Muslim ban was announced, even though Pakistan was not affected.  
She tells me it is still regression.

iii.

In a cold Nevada desert, we watch faint shivers of stars like half-hearted strokes of  
watered-down paint dribbling over distant mountain ranges.  
Like us, they have been made obsolete. Now more than ever we grasp at generations,  
we feel the thinning line of an ancestry on our shoulders  
rather than the soft freedom of American adolescence.  
We are the descendants  
of Native Americans ten times over, and tonight we sit in the back of a pickup truck  
with the city miles behind us  
and we pitch cigarette butts into the expanse.  
Our ashtray is one of sand and fish skeletons; the ground quivers  
with the bones of our ancestors, their legacy buried under  
rustling casino advertisements and rusty tabs from beer cans.  
We are the only ones on this land who are not, and have never been, immigrants.  
Today we are among the most economically disadvantaged groups in the country.

iv.

We carry this, now.

## 2012–2016

### Community Service Project Highlights

**Luisa Banchoff** (Southeast, Class of 2012) hosted student and teacher workshops, focusing on the power of words in affecting change, to honor the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Movement. **Partner:** Red Mountain Writing Project in Birmingham, AL

**Miles Hewitt** (West, Class of 2012) co-lead poetry workshops for homeless youth and organized a day of poetry for a dozen elementary and middle-school students. **Partner:** Washington State University Vancouver's At Home At School Program in Vancouver, WA

**Sojourner Ahebee** (Midwest, Class of 2013) worked with Alzheimer's patients to create, via poetry, a space for the residents of a local nursing home to have conversations about memory and their fear of forgetting. **Partner:** a local nursing home in Interlochen, MI

**Michaela Coplen** (Northeast, Class of 2013), from a military family herself, was passionate about working to bring poetry to the military community—and bring their voices into poetry. In addition to hosting workshops and readings, she also attended the Joining Forces meeting in Washington, D.C. **Partners:** military advocacy group Blue Star Families; volunteer organization Points of Light

**Ashley Gong** (Northeast, Class of 2014) created "Writing Po(w)e(r)try," a series of weekly workshops for students in grades 5–9, to reflect on and respond to the Sandy Hook Elementary shootings and tragedy. **Partner:** Cyrenius H. Booth Library in Newtown, CT

**Madeleine LeCesne** (Southwest, Class of 2014) designed a series of workshops that focused on poetry as a means of finding and defining home. Madeleine also worked with her New Orleans communities to reflect on the tenth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. **Partners:** her local Scholastic Art & Writing Awards Affiliate in Southeast Louisiana; Greater New Orleans Writing Project

**Chasity Hale** (Southeast, Class of 2015) presented a series of 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. **Partners:** Girl Power Rocks; The Betsy Hotel; South Florida CARES Mentoring Movement in Florida

**David Xiang** (Southwest, Class of 2015) focused on the healing and reflective power of poetry while conducting poetry workshops with veterans. **Partners:** multiple Veterans' Centers in Norman and Lawton, OK

**Gopal Raman** (Southwest, Class of 2016) conducted a series of workshops that blended poetry with visual arts, working with local students to reflect on art and artifacts in his local museums. **Partners:** Dallas Museum of Art; Dallas Big Thought; Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas, TX

**Maya Eashwaran** (Southeast, Class of 2016) created a multi-generational Service Project, seeking to connect elementary school students, middle school students, and senior citizens via writing and reading poetry. **Partners:** arts organization WonderRoot; her local Girl Scouts chapter; her local middle schools and libraries

## For Teen Poets, By Teen Poets

### Poetry writing and reading tips from former National Student Poets

1. Be completely receptive and immersed in hearing other young poets' readings and performances because their writing will—as it should—influence your style.
2. Write down every new poet/poem that you hear about and make a concerted effort to explore, and incorporate their poetic techniques, into your poetry.
3. Always keep a running folder of memorable quotes you glean in conversation or on public transportation. The best subject matter is often schoolmates and strangers.
4. Always have a favorite contemporary poet—or two!—to recommend to people.
5. Your job as a writer is to change something. Take it seriously. You have a gift, and it is your responsibility to share it with your community and to introduce others to it. Go and change the world!
6. Take initiative to meet other young writers. Whether it's through a writing camp or an online group, meet your peers—they're brilliant people!
7. Never let anyone consume your work without at least one criticism. Generic encouragement will not help you improve.
8. Kids are poets even before they start writing. They have such a clear voice, and they are fearless when it comes to tackling a new challenge. We need to learn from them and take that element of fearlessness and incorporate it into our writing.
9. Don't be afraid to write what hurts; it's often where the most kinetic poetry originates.
10. Never shy away from trying out new ideas. Your notebook is a place to experiment! Not everything you write will be perfect; not everything you write will win awards and

get published. And that's okay! Write for the sake of writing, not for the sake of showing it to other people.

11. Educate yourself on the art of writing—read as much as possible and read a broad range of authors and poets in a broad range of genres. Be a dabbler—being a poet with knowledge of story writing is a strength.
12. When performing, remember the three P's, something National Student Poets learn from their mentor, the traveling poet Glenis Redmond: plant, personalize, and project.
13. Also, when performing, imagine the words you are speaking coming up from some deep center of your body. Your poetry is powerful, and it deserves a reading which is authentic and rooted, not rushed.
14. Practice, but not too much. As you perform, rediscover the poem you created, and this discovery will be present in your voice and energy.
15. Even on the toughest days, make some time to reflect and journal about what you noticed today, the small details that give life its texture and vitality. By doing this, it becomes easier to engage in a poetic and creative mindset.
16. Always be open and grateful to the world around you, because this world feeds and nurtures the poetry you write.

## Eligibility

For students to be considered for the National Student Poets Program, they must be United States citizens in grades 10 or 11 and enrolled in a public, private, parochial, or home school in the United States. Students must also receive a National Gold or Silver Medal in poetry in the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards.

Founded in 1923, the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards continues to be the longest-running, most prestigious recognition program for creative teens in the U.S., and the largest source of scholarships for young artists and writers. Deadlines to participate in the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards vary by region and may be found at [artandwriting.org](http://artandwriting.org).

From the pool of Scholastic Awards National Medalists in poetry, thirty-five semifinalists for the National Student Poets Program are selected in the spring. The semifinalists are notified and asked to submit additional poetry (two to five works total), a short video about themselves, and a short bio for consideration by the national jury panel.

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.