



For Immediate Release

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**Belise Nishimwe of St. Mary's Academy named Oregon's Poetry Out Loud champion;
Nicole Coronado of Lake Oswego named runner up**

Salem, Oregon – Belise Nishimwe, a sophomore at St. Mary's Academy in Portland, is the 2019 Oregon Poetry Out Loud state champion. Nishimwe was one of nine regional finalists who competed at Saturday's state Poetry Out Loud contest at Salem Public Library. She advances to the national Poetry Out Loud competition, scheduled for April 29-May 1 in Washington, D.C.

Nicole Coronado, a senior at Lakeridge High School, was named runner up. If Nishimwe (pronounced knee-sheem-way) is unable to attend the national competition Coronado would be invited to represent Oregon.

Extremely passionate about social justice and law especially as it pertains to immigrants and their rights, Nishimwe was born and lived in a refugee camp in Tanzania until the age of five, when she and her family moved to America through Catholic Charities. Now a U.S. citizen, she has dedicated herself to being someone who can create a platform that gives voice to immigrants and refugees and the representation they need.

"This is everyone's victory," said Nishimwe. "I want to represent refugees and immigrants in a good light. I wanted to do Poetry Out Loud because when I was younger I wanted that representation that I rarely ever saw. I wanted to see other immigrants like me participate in a variety of activities and succeed, so that I could know that I could achieve that too."

The poems Nishimwe presented at the state contest were: "Love's Philosophy" by Percy Bysshe Shelley; "If We Must Die," by Claude McKay; and "Worth" by Marilyn Nelson.

“When I listened to Belise deliver poetry to a silent room I recognized her genius is a combination of skill and courage,” said Oregon Poet Laureate Kim Stafford, who attended and presented at the state contest. “Poetry comes up from the earth through her voice to the world.”

“Belise’s poise, power and presence make her an outstanding representative for Oregon at the national contest,” said Deb Vaughn, Arts Commission arts education/Poetry Out Loud coordinator. “We are thrilled to watch her shine among her peers in Washington D.C. next month.”

The other six students who competed, after advancing in regional contests, are: Christina Brennan, Oregon Connections Academy, Mill City; Amy Jarvie, Oregon School for the Deaf, Salem (2018 state runner up); Aynika Nelson, Brookings-Harbor High School, Brookings; Kaiden Randall, West Linn High School; Gabriella Shirtcliff, Summit High School, Bend; Megan Southard, Bonanza High School, Klamath Falls; and Hannah VonHolle, Logos Public Charter School, Medford.

Poetry Out Loud is a national recitation contest for high school students, organized in Oregon by the Oregon Arts Commission in collaboration with the NEA and the Poetry Foundation. Participants memorize and present poems, practicing public speaking skills while exploring the complexity of poetry.

Editor’s note: [View a clip](#) of Nishimwe performing and her reaction when she was named state champion.

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The Oregon Arts Commission provides leadership, funding and arts programs through its grants, special initiatives and services. Nine commissioners, appointed by the Governor, determine arts needs and establish policies for public support of the arts. The Arts Commission became part of Business Oregon (formerly Oregon Economic and Community Development Department) in 1993, in recognition of the expanding role the arts play in the broader social, economic and educational arenas of Oregon communities. In 2003, the Oregon legislature moved the operations of the Oregon Cultural Trust to the Arts Commission, streamlining operations and making use of the Commission’s expertise in grantmaking, arts and cultural information and community cultural development.

The Arts Commission is supported with general funds appropriated by the Oregon legislature and with federal funds from the National Endowment for the Arts as well as

funds from the Oregon Cultural Trust. More information about the Oregon Arts Commission is available online at: www.oregonartscommission.org.