Trayshun Holmes-Gournaris of Oregon School for the Deaf named Oregon’s 2022 Poetry Out Loud champion; Maria Daniels of Beaverton named runner up

Salem, Oregon – Trayshun Holmes-Gournaris of Monmouth, a senior at Oregon School for the Deaf, is the 2022 Oregon Poetry Out Loud state champion. Holmes-Gournaris was one of 11 finalists who competed at Friday’s Virtual Poetry Out Loud State Contest. He advances to the national Poetry Out Loud competition, to be held virtually on May 1 (semifinals) and June 5 (finals).

Maria Daniels, a sophomore at St. Stephens Academy in Beaverton, was named runner up. If Holmes-Gournaris is unable to participate in the national competition Daniels would be invited to represent Oregon.

This is Holmes-Gournaris’ second year competing at the Poetry Out Loud State Contest. At the Oregon School for the Deaf he presides over student body government and plays on the basketball and track teams. He loves all animals, music, dancing and “clowning.” In the future, he would like a career in a trade that requires working with his hands. After studying “Caged Bird” by Maya Angelou for this competition, it became his very favorite poem.

“I am shocked and excited,” said Holmes-Gournaris moments after the results were announced. “I have been trying for years to win. I really enjoy this field.”

The poems Holmes-Gournaris presented at the state contest were “The Song of the Smoke” by W.E.B. Du Bois, “Caged Bird” by Maya Angelou and “Silence” by Thomas Hood.

“Trayshun brought originality and a strong poise to each of his poems, even to something as well-known as Maya Angelou’s "Caged Bird," said Portland Creative Laureate Emeritus Subashini Ganesan, who served as a judge for the state contest. “He stood out amongst his peers because he is a grounded competitor who allows
unique strengths to authentically permeate his presentations. Personally, it is an honor to serve as a judge in Oregon's POL format which prioritizes equity and access so that every student feels empowered to compete as themselves.*

The Arts Commission established accessibility guidelines for deaf students to participate in Poetry Out Loud in 2009 when the Oregon School for the Deaf began participating. Those guidelines have now become a national standard. Holmes-Gournaris is the second state champion to be named from the school; former OSFD student Tiffany Hill was the 2009 Poetry Out Loud state champion.

“It was such an honor to witness the dedication and creativity of the students and teachers who participated this year,” said Briana Linden, the Arts Commission’s Poetry Out Loud coordinator. “It’s commendable how they continue to be flexible as learning modalities shift and yet shine through with powerful and nuanced performances.”

“This was Trayshun’s second year participating with Poetry Out Loud and his performances this year blew us away,” added Linden. “He shows us that poetry performance has no boundaries and also serves as a powerful and important reminder that those who are deaf and disabled are an integral part of our artistic communities. We are overjoyed to support Trayshun as he moves forward to nationals.”

The other nine students who competed, after winning their school competitions, are: Clara Bennett, Crater High School, Central Point; Cecily Cooper, Crook County High School, Prineville; Juwon Kim, Lakeridge High School, Lake Oswego; Alyssia Menezes, Lincoln High School, Portland; Elena Morris, Oregon Charter Academy, Mill City; Ava Neudeck, West Linn High School, West Linn; Mariah Reynolds, Redmond High School, Redmond; Auria Vallloton, Oakland High School, Oakland; and Willa Wise, Grant High School, Portland.

The 2022 Poetry Out Loud competition was conducted virtually to ensure the safety and health of participating students and staff. The decision was based on guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the World Health Organization and General Counsel for the National Endowment for the Arts.

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: Video to be available on request after 8 p.m.
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.