



City of
OAKLAND
California

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News from: Oakland Public Library

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Cities of Oakland and San Francisco Announce First Annual Youth Poet Laureate Competitions

Oakland, CA – The Cities of Oakland and San Francisco are each about to gain new, young, and articulate representatives. For the first time ever, the Oakland Public Library and San Francisco Public Library, in partnership with Youth Speaks (the country's leading nonprofit presenter of spoken word performance, education and youth development programs), are staging competitions that will result in two Youth Poet Laureates, one from each city. The winners will each be honored with \$5,000 in scholarships and the opportunity to officially represent their communities through poetry, media, and public appearances. **The search for talented young writers (age 13-18) begins Sunday, April 1 – just in time for National Poetry Month – when judges will begin accepting submissions. The deadline for all submissions is May 15.** Finalists will be announced in early July, and the winners will be announced in September. (See below for submissions guidelines.)

Through a competitive process judged by local leaders and celebrity authors (including renowned artists Arisa White and Marc Bamuthi Joseph), the Youth Poet Laureate initiative will celebrate exceptional teen poets who represent the best of the Bay Area. The winning poet in each city will receive a \$5,000 educational scholarship and will serve as an ambassador for arts, education and youth expression during a year of public service and academic enrichment, including publication of their work in an anthology.

Oakland-based poet Arisa White (author of *Hurrah's Nest*, 2012) is one of several acclaimed writers volunteering to judge the competition. "As a poet who believes in the transformative and healing power of poetry, it is necessary for me to support young people being active and influential citizens through their writing," said White, who was recently featured on hip-hop mogul Jay-Z's website. "I'm excited to be a part of this project, because it celebrates and honors young people and their perspective, their stories, their voices, their creative minds, and their ability to influence the communities around them."

"Young writers today are at a crossroads," said project coordinator Amy Sonnie, Teen Outreach Librarian of the Oakland Public Library. "Dwindling budgets for school arts and library media centers send mixed messages about the value of art and literacy, even as state academic guidelines taut the importance of 21st century learning. The Youth Poet Laureate competition is for young people who write to send their own message, their own way. This first-of-its-kind contest celebrates the hard work of young poets who turn to paper and pen, the microphone and even YouTube to speak their truth and make us think deeply about our world. The Bay Area has long been home to this kind of young talent. Now, we invite those honest, brave, original voices to apply and win the top literary honor in their city."

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Youth, parents and teachers can learn more and **apply** online at: www.youthspeaks.org/2012poetlaureate. To be eligible, finalists must be 13-18 years old and a current resident of the city for which they apply.

Help sessions for applicants will be held in late April and early May. For more information contact Amy Sonnie at 510-238-7233.

The competition is supported by a broad coalition of fifteen partner agencies across the Bay Area:

- Oakland Public Library
- San Francisco Public Library
- Youth Speaks
- Oakland Unified School District
- San Francisco Unified School District
- Oakland School of the Arts
- 826 Valencia
- SF WritersCorps
- Youth Radio
- Streetside Stories
- Write-to-Read and Alameda County Library
- ProArts Gallery
- San Francisco Department of Children Youth and Families
- Mills College Community Teaching Project
- Generations Literary Journal

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Note: Partner agencies are available for on-camera interviews. Audio PSAs will also be available.

