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## Congratulations to Statewide 2026 Vermont Poetry Out Loud Winner Eason DeMarsico-Thorne

BURLINGTON, VT — Eason DeMarsico-Thorne, a student at Brattleboro Union High School, took top honors at the **2026 Poetry Out Loud State Finals** held in Flynn Space at **the Flynn on March 5**. Gretchen Wertlieb, a student at South Burlington High School, was the runner up, and the third-place finalist was Aiva Reed, a student at Windsor High School. Eason heads to Washington, DC, at the end of April to represent Vermont in the Poetry Out Loud National Competition.

Ten students recited their chosen poems in three rounds during the state final competition, which was emceed by playwright, dramaturg, performer, and teaching artist, Gina Stevensen. The top three finalists with the highest cumulative scores after the first two rounds continued to round three, reciting their last poem. Eason recited *Fruit of the Flower* by Countee Cullen, *I Shall Return* by Claude Mckay, and *A Southern Road* by Helene Johnson. Gretchen recited *To a Young Dancing Girl* by Elsa Gidlow, *Thoughts in Jail* by Katharine Rolston Fisher, and *I shall forget you presently, my dear (Sonnet IV)*, by Edna St. Vincent Millay. Aiva recited *Why We Oppose Women Travelling in Railway Trains* by Alice Duer Miller, *Militants to Certain Other Women* by Katharine Rolston Fisher, and *If I Had Known* by Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson.

The other finalists were Phoebe Gresham from Mount Mansfield Union High School, Rane Hall from Theftford Academy, Marcus Burns from St. Johnsbury Academy, Taylor Daleb from Peoples Academy, Moya Thayer from Burlington High School, Theo Novak from Champlain Valley Union High School, and Patrick Tester from Lyndon Institute.

18 schools across Vermont registered to bring the national Poetry Out Loud program to their classrooms in 2025/26, reaching 2,000 students with about 60 teachers participating. 15 students were selected by their teachers as school champions and advanced to participate in the statewide semi-finals competition, which was held on February 12 at the Barre Opera House and emceed by Gina Stevensen.

Poetry recitations were evaluated by the judges using these criteria: physical presence, voice and articulation, evidence of understanding, interpretation, accuracy, and overall performance. The 2026 Poetry Out Loud Finals judges were Spoken Word artist LN Bethea, Dean of the Core Division, Creative Studio, and School of Social Innovation at Champlain College Robin Perlah, Poet and Managing Editor of New England Review Leslie Sainz, and Director of Development at Downstreet Housing & Community Development Sarah Madru.

State champion Eason DeMarsico-Thorne recieves \$200 and advances to the national finals where \$50,000 in awards and school stipends are distributed. The state champion's school

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receives \$500 for the purchase of poetry materials. First runner-up Gretchen receives \$100, with \$200 for her school.

Vermont Poetry Out Loud is supported by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Vermont Arts Council. Since the program began in 2005, more than four million students across the country have participated in the national program. The Poetry Foundation provides and administers the monetary prizes.

For more information about Vermont Poetry Out Loud, visit <https://www.flynnvt.org/Education/poetry-out-loud>.

## **About the Vermont Arts Council**

The Vermont Arts Council envisions a Vermont where all people have access to the arts and creativity in their lives, education, and communities. Engagement with the arts transforms individuals, connects us more deeply to each other, energizes the economy, and sustains the vibrant cultural landscape that makes Vermont a great place to live. Since 1965, the Council has been the state's primary provider of funding, advocacy, and information for the arts in Vermont. Learn more at [vermontartscouncil.org](http://vermontartscouncil.org).

## **About the Flynn**

The Flynn is dedicated to offering high-quality performing arts experiences to Vermonters. Throughout the year, the Flynn hosts a diverse array of international, national, and regional artists, presenting performances that inspire and create transformative moments for audiences of all ages. In addition to stage performances, the Flynn fosters accessibility to the arts through a variety of programs, including classes, camps, artist residencies, community performances outside the theater, and the annual Burlington Discover Jazz Festival. The Flynn is committed to making the arts accessible to all. For more information, visit [flynnvt.org](http://flynnvt.org).

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