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CALIAH MCCALL NAMED NORTH CAROLINA POETRY OUT LOUD CHAMPION

CHARLOTTE - North Carolina Arts Council and Children's Theatre of Charlotte announce that Caliyah McCall, a junior at Knightdale High School in Wake County, is the 2026 North Carolina Poetry Out Loud® champion. A program of the National Endowment for the Arts and administered by Mid Atlantic Arts, this poetry recitation competition for high school students is designed to improve public speaking skills, build confidence, and introduce students to literary history. More than 30 high school students from 15 high schools and organizations statewide participated in the Poetry Out Loud regional and state finals, which took place at Children's Theatre of Charlotte at ImaginOn on Saturday, February 28, 2026.

"Poetry Out Loud inspires me to keep pushing on and keep going," says the 2026 North Carolina Poetry Out Loud State Champion Caliyah McCall. "Two years ago, Caliyah was first runner-up," says Matthew Raines, McCall's teacher at Knightdale High School. "Last year, we couldn't come back, and she was downhearted. She asked what can we do to make sure we get there again. Her dedication and talent are second to none. She latched on to every direction like a sponge, made it hers, and made it beautiful."

Poetry Out Loud lifts poetry off the page, creating community and connection. Poetry Out Loud starts in the classroom or at the local level with an area organization. Winners advance to a regional and/or state competition, and ultimately to the national finals. At the North Carolina finals, student competitors recite works they memorized from a poetry anthology that celebrates historic American voices in recognition of America's 250th anniversary. Since the program began in 2005, more than 4.5 million students across the country have participated in Poetry Out Loud.

North Carolina Poetry Out Loud proudly celebrates the outstanding high school students who showcased their passion for poetry and performance in this year's statewide recitation hosted by Children's Theatre of Charlotte.

Caliyah McCall wowed the judges with their recitation of "Militants to Certain Other Women" by Katharine Rolston Fisher, "Memorial Wreath" by Dudley Randall, and "Battle Hymn of the Republic" by



Julia Ward Howe, earning her the title. Their passion for poetry did not go unnoticed for runner-up, Giada Martucci, a senior at Eugene Ashley High School in New Hanover County, whose selection featured “The Paper Nautilus” by Marianne Moore. North Carolina Poetry Out Loud also recognizes the exceptional efforts of all the State Finalists: Rachael Husak from Lake Norman Charter High School (Mecklenburg County), Chakrahamsini Karanam from Lake Norman Charter High School (Mecklenburg County), Madison Mintegui from Eugene Ashley High School (New Hanover County), and Han Nguyen from Union County Early College (Union County).

The North Carolina Poetry Out Loud finals were hosted by Children’s Theatre of Charlotte and emceed by Charlotte Poet Laureate Jay Ward. Guest judges included Sage Chioma, Donovan Livingston, Madia Medico, Emilia Phillips, Molly Rice, Petra Salazar, Crystal Smith, and Chris Vitiello. Caliyah McCall will receive \$200, and Knightdale High School will receive a \$500 stipend for the purchase of poetry materials. As the first runner-up, Giada Martucci will receive \$100, with \$200 for Eugene Ashley High School. Caliyah McCall will advance to the Poetry Out Loud National Finals in Washington, D.C. this April, and will compete for the coveted national title and \$20,000 grand prize. All state and jurisdictional champions will compete in the national semifinals on Tuesday, April 28, from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

Established by Congress in 1965, the National Endowment for the Arts is an independent federal agency that is the largest funder of the arts and arts education in communities nationwide and a catalyst of public and private support for the arts. By advancing opportunities for arts participation and practice, the NEA fosters and sustains an environment in which the arts benefit everyone in the United States. To learn more, visit [arts.gov](https://www.arts.gov) or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [X](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [YouTube](#).

ABOUT THE NORTH CAROLINA ARTS COUNCIL

The North Carolina Arts Council, a division of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, builds on our state’s long-standing love of the arts, leading the way to a more vibrant future. The North Carolina Arts Council is an economic catalyst, fueling a thriving nonprofit creative sector that generates \$2.23 billion in annual direct economic activity. We sustain diverse arts expression and traditions while investing in innovative approaches to art-making. The North Carolina Arts Council has proven to be a champion for youth by cultivating tomorrow’s creative citizens through arts education.

<http://www.NCArts.org>

ABOUT CHILDREN’S THEATRE OF CHARLOTTE



Children's Theatre of Charlotte is a nationally-recognized theatre company in Charlotte, North Carolina, founded in 1948. They produce professional theatre experiences for children and families through Mainstage productions, educational programs, and outreach initiatives, inspiring generations to explore the wonder of their world. While reaching more than 250,000 children, families, and educators annually with their programming, Children's Theatre of Charlotte provides a space that cultivates creativity and gives children a sense of belonging. The Theatre takes pride in leading the storytellers of tomorrow, asking children to think and dream big and stay true to themselves. This philosophy, coupled with viewing the world through the lens of kindness, led the company to form the initiative, [The Kindness Project](#). To learn more about the Theatre and its programs, visit ctcharlotte.org or call 704-973-2828.