



2024 State Finals

MARCH 2, 2024 | GRANDSTREET THEATRE | HELENA, MONTANA

MONTANA

POETRY  
OUT LOUD

23 / 24



Created by the National Endowment for the Arts, in partnership with the Poetry Foundation and the Montana Arts Council, this program helps students master public speaking skills, build self-confidence, and learn about their literary heritage.

Beginning at the classroom level, winners advance to a schoolwide competition and then to a regional competition before advancing to State Finals. Ultimately, a state champion will emerge to represent Montana at the National Finals.

One winner at the state level will receive \$200 and an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, D.C. (with parent or chaperone) to compete for the national championship. The state winner's school will receive a \$500 stipend for the purchase of poetry books. A runner-up in each state will receive \$100, with \$200 for their school library. A total of \$50,000 in scholarships and school stipends will be awarded for the winners at the National Finals.



**MARCH 2, 2024  
GRANDSTREET THEATRE  
HELENA, MT**

**2024 STATE FINALS SCHEDULE**

**10:00 AM**

Welcome and Introductions  
MAC Executive Director Krys Holmes  
Poet Laureate Chris La Tray

**10:15 – 11:30 AM**

Semifinal Round One | First Poem  
Recitations by Alternates

**11:30 – 12:30 PM**

Semifinal Round Two | Second Poem  
Announcement of Finalists

**12:30 PM**

Lunch Break

**1:30 PM**

Remarks by Amy Stolls  
Literary Arts Director, NEA

Final Round Three | Third Poem  
(top 7 finalists recite)

**2:15 – 2:45 PM**

Poetry Readings and Comments  
by Guest Judges

**2:45 PM**

Closing Remarks and  
Awards Presentation

**3:00 PM**

Reception + Photos





**CHRIS LA TRAY**  
**MONTANA POET LAUREATE**

"I don't consider my efforts as a poet to be so much a career as a way of living. In Anishinaabe world view, to live an Anishinaabe life is to make every footstep a prayer; as a poet, attaching a poetic world view—where every observable moment may be viewed as a poem—to the Anishinaabe one, one seeks to make every footstep a poem as well. Serving as Poet Laureate will allow me to share that perspective with more people, in service to people, which is something our wider community needs. Serving as Poet Laureate is exactly that: service."

—**Chris La Tray**

Chris La Tray has authored two collections of poetry: *One-Sentence Journal: Short Poems and Essays from the World at Large* and *Descended From a Travel-worn Satchel: Haiku & Haibun*. His debut collection, *One-Sentence Journal*, received multiple honors including the 2018 Montana Book Award, the 2019 High Plains Book Award (Best First Book), and finalist for the 2019 High Plains Book Award (Best Book by Indigenous Writer). His third book, *Becoming Little Shell*, will be published in 2024 by Milkweed Editions.

"I'm excited to have this opportunity," Chris says of becoming Montana's Poet Laureate. "I never considered myself a poet till other people started calling me one." Speaking of his plans for the role, Chris notes his interest in getting to places that might be overlooked as venues for poetry. "I look forward to taking it on the road, out to all the tribal colleges. I just got a call from Wibaux. I'm stoked—Wibaux is practically North Dakota!" Chris also plans to continue working with Montana's Office of Public Instruction and Humanities Montana as part of its Indian Education for All Initiative, educating Montanans about its history through the perspectives of the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa and Métis cultures.

Raised in Frenchtown, Chris is a member of the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians and his facility with words is not unique in his family; Chris' Métis great-great-grandfather Mose served as an interpreter for the US Army, speaking at least six languages, and Chris is today an advocate for reviving Indigenous languages spoken in Montana. Prior to publication of his first book Chris was a contributing writer to the *Missoula Independent* and had published fiction and nonfiction works in a number of publications. He maintains an online journal, *An Irritable Métis*, where he grapples with issues of cultural identity, the natural world, and where this place called Montana is going.

*Read two of Chris La Tray's poems on page 15.*

## SEMI-FINALS ROUND ONE

- 01 **Isabelle Bennett**  
Self-Portrait with Sylvia Plath's Braid by *Diane Seuss*
- 02 **Jake Dunker**  
Life Cycle of Common Man by *Howard Nemerov*
- 03 **Anastasia Bouick**  
At a Window by *Carl Sandburg*
- 04 **Rebecca Rehder**  
Full Moon by *Elinor Wylie*
- 05 **Teagan Washburn**  
Envy by *Mary Lamb*
- 06 **Donald Hammond**  
Words by *Pauli Murray*
- 07 **Amy Thoft**  
Lines Written in Early Spring by *William Wordsworth*
- 08 **Molly Ogan**  
The Strength of Fields by *James L. Dickey*



- 09 **Brea Wagner**  
To have without holding *by Marge Piercy*
- 10 **Charli Cox**  
Thoughtless Cruelty *by Charles Lamb*
- 11 **Hadley Keintz**  
Mansplaining *by Jennifer Militello*
- 12 **Elliot Ganno**  
Ozymandias *by Percy Bysshe Shelley*
- 13 **Kellen Miller**  
now i'm bologna *by José Olivarez*
- 14 **McKenna Black**  
Acquainted with the Night *by Robert Frost*
- 15 **Ellette Whitcomb**  
Love's Philosophy *by Percy Bysshe Shelley*

Photos by Katie Knight



## SEMI-FINALS ROUND TWO

- 01 **Isabelle Bennett**  
*Dawn by Ella Higginson*
- 02 **Jake Dunker**  
*The Paradox by Paul Laurence Dunbar*
- 03 **Anastasia Bouick**  
*Dirge in Woods by George Meredith*
- 04 **Rebecca Rehder**  
*On the Death of Anne Brontë by Charlotte Brontë*
- 05 **Teagan Washburn**  
*The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost*
- 06 **Donald Hammond III**  
*The Debt by Paul Laurence Dunbar*
- 07 **Amy Thoft**  
*Listening in Deep Space by Diane Thiel*
- 08 **Molly Ogan**  
*Requiem by Camille T. Dungy*





- 09 **Brea Wagner**  
Cathedral of Salt *by Nick Flynn*
- 10 **Charli Cox**  
Bright Copper Kettles *by Vijay Seshadri*
- 11 **Hadley Keintz**  
Invictus *by William Earnest Henley*
- 12 **Elliot Ganno**  
Summer *by Chen Chen*
- 13 **Kellen Miller**  
The Paradox *by Paul Laurence Dunbar*
- 14 **McKenna Black**  
Late Summer *by Jennifer Grotz*
- 15 **Ellette Whitcomb**  
To the Oppressors *by Pauli Murray*

*Photo by Katie Knight*



# STATE FINALIST BIOGRAPHIES



## Isabelle Bennett

Isabelle is a senior this year. She moved to Montana from Washington with her mom, dad, and twin sister in 2022, but feels very at home here.

She participates in a few different activities like band, theater, DECA, Brave Mentoring, and others. In the fall, she will be attending the University of Montana, majoring in either Music Education or Elementary Education. She has always been a very theatrical person, so spoken word is her jam.



## Charli Cox

Charli Cox was born and raised in Butte, Montana. She is in 11th grade. Musical theater holds a special place in Charli's heart and is one of her

most significant hobbies. She became involved with this hobby at a young age and continues to love it just as much as she did when she started. Other hobbies include playing tennis, painting, and hiking. Her favorite subjects in school are Biology, English, and Art class.



## McKenna Black

McKenna Black is a junior. She currently participates in school and club volleyball, tennis, Speech and Drama, Poetry Out Loud, student council

and her school's annual play production. She enjoys spending time outside, especially hiking, paddleboarding, watching the sunset, or stargazing. In the future, she hopes to pursue her passions by getting a degree and career in Aerospace engineering. Creation through math and logic has always fascinated her, so aerospace engineering is the perfect career for her.



## Anastasia Bouick

Anastasia Bouick was born in Washington state and moved to Montana 3 years ago. She has participated in Business Professionals

of America, Speech, Choir, and Yearbook. She is proud of her Korean heritage while also embracing Montana's traditions. She is an artsy person who is super into video games. Anastasia loves cats and has a goblin-esque cat named Jackie. She hopes to get a career in character design.



### **Jake Dunker**

Jake Dunker is 17 years old and is a junior. Jake was born in Arizona and moved to Montana in 2012. Throughout his high school career, he

has worked; been involved in many extracurricular activities and clubs such as National Honor Society and speech and debate; and has attended summer classes through the University of Montana and Harvard University. Jake hopes to study genetics and molecular biology in college.



### **Elliot Ganno**

Elliot Ganno is a sophomore. Their hobbies include reading, drawing, acting, and taekwondo. Elliot entered POL after practicing poems in theater class. They love reciting poetry. Elliot presents and writes some poetry of their own to show their inner emotions and to connect with others on a deeper level. They would like to thank their theater teacher, Ms. Brayko, their mom and all their English teachers for encouraging them.

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### **Donald Hammond III**

Donald Hammond III was born in Reno, Nevada. He has lived in four states and has visited many more. He currently

attends Simms High School. At Simms, Donald participates on the Speech and Drama team, competing in Impromptu. This year he was Impromptu Northern Division Champion and competed at the State Competition at Choteau, Montana. In his free time, he relishes video games, hunting, and working with his father on auto or construction projects.



### **Hadley Keintz**

Hadley Keintz is a freshman who likes poetry because it always portrays a very meaningful story, no matter the subject. She is very academically driven. She loves traveling and wants to one day see many different famous landmarks with her own eyes. Her favorite book is *The Outsiders* because it is the only book that she has stayed up late to read. It was also the inspiration for her third poem.

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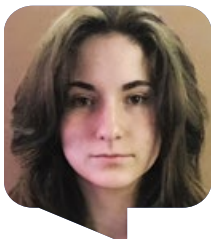
# STATE FINALIST BIOGRAPHIES



## Kellen Miller

Kellan is a Junior at Loyola Sacred Heart High School. She has played soccer all three years and has participated in Speech and

Debate for the last two years. Kellan's favorite poem is "smart" by Shel Silverstein. She finds this poem hilarious, and she loves pretty much everything that Shel Silverstein writes. She chose the poems she will recite today because she wanted something that was meaningful and long enough to leave an impact.



## Molly Ogan

Molly Ogan is a Junior. She loves writing and reciting poetry inspired by her hometown of Butte, Montana. She believes in the power of

words to create a better world. She aspires to put this belief into practice by attending the University of Montana to study to become a high school English teacher and published poet. Her personal philosophy is borrowed from Jack Kerouac; "Rest and be kind, you have nothing to prove."



## Rebecca Rehder

Rebecca is a freshman and is the vice president of the freshmen class for her school's student council. Rebecca participates in volleyball,

basketball, Speech and drama. In her free time, she likes to fish, write, garden and spend time with the people she loves. She has been moving her whole life. She is hoping to conquer her fear of public speaking, which is a main reason why she participates in Poetry Out Loud.



## Amy Thoft

Amy Thoft was born in Wasilla, Alaska and was raised there the first ten years of her life. She wants to earn her pilot's license so that she can

fly in Alaska as a part of her career. Amy enjoys reading and shooting her bow. She plays percussion in Polson's concert band and is currently learning harmonica. She has participated on her school's Speech & Debate team in addition to performing and serving as stage manager in theater.





### **Brea Wagner**

Brea Wagner is a sixteen-year-old from Butte, Montana, who is in 11th grade. She has maintained a 4.0 GPA for her whole life and plans to

become valedictorian. She is a competitive dancer for The Dynamic Dance Academy and has won several national titles. Her other hobbies include singing, acting, reading, and hanging out with her friends. She also enjoys volunteering around her community in her spare time.



### **Teagan Washburn**

Teagan Washburn is a senior. She is active in cheerleading and Future Farmers of America. This year, she is her chapter's president. She is also

very active in the sport of rodeo and has always loved riding horses. Teagan always had a love for memorizing, so she jumped straight into Poetry Out Loud. Teagan is thankful for her teacher and friends, without whom she would not have gotten this opportunity.



### **Ellette Whitcomb**

Ellette Whitcomb is fifteen years old and a sophomore. She is currently in her school's musical, Mean Girls, and her school's

extracurricular audition choir. Ellette is a dancer studying jazz, hip hop, acrobatics, modern, and ballet. She enjoys dark chocolate, cuddling cats, reading extensively, writing literature, listening to, and creating music, and hiking. After high school, she plans to continue her education at university, hoping to pursue a combined study of the performing arts and writing.



## Mark Gibbons

Mark Gibbons grew up in Alberton, Montana, and married his high school sweetheart. He taught high school English for a decade, and earned an MFA in creative writing from the University of Montana.

The first college graduate in his family, Mark has worked a variety of jobs available to those determined to stay in Montana at all costs: dishwasher, janitor, carpenter, wood cutter, gandy dancer, surveyor, fire fighter, furniture mover, laborer, truck driver, and teacher.

In 1970, Mark was in a poetry workshop at his high school taught by an unknown Indian poet, James Welch. A student of Richard Hugo's, Welch gave Mark permission to write poetry in his own voice, out of his own life experiences. He's been writing ever since. He is the author of 11 books of poetry. Most recently, *In the Weeds*, Drumlummon Institute, appeared in 2021. Mark is the editor of the Montana Poets Series for FootHills Publishing, and served as Montana's tenth Poet Laureate from 2021 to 2023. In that capacity he produced sixty interviews of Montana poets entitled *Poets in Montana* now archived on MCAT's YouTube Channel and at Humanities Montana.

Mark has been teaching poetry in Montana for four decades and still works for the Missoula Writing Collaborative. He has been involved with Poetry Out Loud since its inception serving as a judge and recitation coach over the last two decades.

Mark lives in Missoula with his wife, Pam, in the lower Rattlesnake Valley.



## Aaron Parrett

Aaron Parrett is a professor of English at the University of Providence. He has written many books, articles, and essays, including *Montana: Then and Now* (2014), and *Literary Butte* (2015). In 2017 he printed a collection of previously published fiction in a fine letterpress edition called *Maple & Lead* (Territorial Press) to critical acclaim, which won an Artist Innovation Award from the Montana Arts Council as well as a High Plains Book

Award. A fiddler and songwriter, he has also released several CDs and LPs of original music, including the acclaimed *The Sinners* (1996). Along with writer Russell Rowland, Parrett co-founded a monthly podcast about Montana literature called *Breakfast in Montana*. He is also Executive Director of The Drumlummon Institute, a nonprofit 501 (c) 3 in Helena devoted to publication of quality art and literature related to Montana and the West.



### Caroline Patterson

Caroline Patterson is the author of *The Stone Sister*, winner of the 2021 Big Moose Prize from Black Lawrence Press and winner of the 2022 High Plains Book Festival first prize for women's fiction. She published the collection, *Ballet at the Moose Lodge*, a literary anthology *Montana Women Writers: A Geography of the Heart*, which won a gold Willa Prize. Her work has been included in anthologies including *A Million Acres*, *Montana Noir*, *Bright Bones*, and *The New Montana Story* as well as publications including *Southwest Review*, *Epoch*, and *Seventeen*. A graduate of the University of Montana creative writing program in fiction, she was awarded the Wallace Stegner Fellowship in fiction at Stanford University, the Joseph Henry Jackson Prize from the San Francisco Foundation, and a 2021 Artist Innovation Award from the Montana Arts Council. She has been awarded residencies at Ucross, the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts and Ragdale. In 2021, she retired as the executive director from the Missoula Writing Collaborative where she worked since 2014, putting writers to teach poetry in 40 rural, tribal and town schools in western Montana. She is currently at work on a new novel.

Caroline lives with her husband, writer Fred Haefele, in the Missoula home her great-grandfather built in 1906 on the banks of the Clark Fork River where, he came when his five-year-old son sickened back in Chicago. She and Fred share the house with their dog, Marlowe, who insists they get out for his daily constitutional.



### Natalie Peeterse

Natalie Peeterse is the co-author of the graphic novel *Thunderous*, which won a High Plains Book Award in 2023. Her poetry chapbook *Black Birds: Blue Horse, An Elegy* won the Gold Line Press Poetry Prize in 2011. A second poetry chapbook, *Dreadful : Luminosity, Letters*, was published by Educe Press in the spring of 2017. She was included in *I Go to the Ruined Place: Contemporary Poems in Defense of Global Human Rights* (Lost Horse Press), and several other anthologies. Natalie has an MFA from the University of Montana and has been a fellow with the Arizona Commission on the Arts, a participant at the Squaw Valley Community of Writers, an artist in residence at the Caldera Institute, a participant in the 2018 US Poets in Mexico in Merida, Yucatan and most recently a Visiting Scholar at the University of Washington's Whiteley Center at the Friday Harbor Laboratories. She is a recipient of the 2013 Artist Innovation Award by the Montana Arts Council. She lives in Helena, Montana.

## ACCURACY JUDGE



### Donna Davis

Quondam attorney and philosophy prof, Montana native Donna Davis is an award-winning poet and actor. For almost a decade, she taught poetry in Montana and Wyoming schools as a Poet on the Prairie under the auspices of the National Writer's Voice and the 92nd Street Y. She simultaneously served as a Tumblewords (a WESTAF program) teaching poet.

In 1997, Donna was awarded a Montana Arts Council Individual Artist Fellowship in Literature. She was later the winner of a Myrna Loy Center artist award, the first for poetry, and a Helena National Forest artist residency. An avid supporter of intellectual freedom, she has been honored by the ACLU of Montana and other organizations. Her work appears in various anthologies, including Poets Across the Big Sky.

## BIOGRAPHIES FOR ALTERNATE FINALISTS

### Laurina Barbosa

Laurina Barbosa is a junior this year. She is student council president and part of her school's yearbook staff. Laurina enjoys public speaking, and recently qualified for the national speech and debate tournament in dramatic interpretation. Her hobbies include dance, theater, and crafting. She is looking forward to attending fashion and business school after her high school career so one day she can become a seamstress and own her own boutique.

### Avani Champaneria

Avani Champaneria is a senior who has competed in speech and drama since she was a freshman, so this contest is right up her alley. She also participates in cross country, volleyball, band and choir. Avani plays the trumpet, which she feels reflects her loud and outgoing personality. She enjoys hanging out with friends, playing with her cats, drawing, and reading and writing

poetry. She absolutely loves poetry, so she is extremely excited for this opportunity.

### Hadley Dennison

Hadley Dennison is a senior at Flathead High School in Kalispell. Her future plans include beginning her college years at Flathead Valley Community College, majoring in criminology with a theater minor, and completing her degree at the University of Montana with the same major and minor.

### Dani Stubsten

Dani Stubsten is a sophomore at Gallatin High School in Bozeman, Montana. Dani loves to hunt, fish, read, write stories, and paint. She also plays the drums and is a member of her school's marching band. During COVID, Dani would read poetry as a way to pass the time. This is her first year participating in Poetry Out Loud, and she is honored to present today.



# DEAR BUTTE

*Two Related Poems by Chris La Tray*

## Lexington Terrace

There are too many clouds to see  
how the morning stars gaze over Butte  
but I stare skyward anyway,  
early cold embracing me like a blanket,  
pieces from the broken sidewalk  
reminding my bare feet of their softness.  
In the little green house where a  
single lamp glows away the darkness  
a gas furnace hisses and bangs and grumbles  
over being called on to warm me up.  
The day's work looms near and I sit  
a few moments more in a silence full of sounds,  
wondering at the local foxes,  
waiting for the coffee to kick on.

## Dear Butte

A stranger, where might I  
begin to love this place  
should I find the need to stay?  
Northward, high over the city, with  
its jagged skyline of headframes  
nodding to old industrial glory,  
roads of cracked pavement and dirt,  
sloping and winding and twisting,  
and always reflecting as I climb  
that this must suck in winter.  
And what of winter up here over 6000',  
near double the elevation where I live?  
Winds howl in all seasons and  
spring is notoriously slow in arriving  
before summer heat settles in with a grudge.  
I could find my way to a quiet life  
tucked away in one of these  
old houses slouching on the hill,  
the richest hill, it is said,  
at least during its day, so much so  
that this town lit up the world  
and the movers and shakers who  
hoard such things took it all  
with them, scarred the earth,  
left behind ruin, yes,  
but also pride, and attitude, and  
legendary celebrations all too loud for me,  
but there are always dusty corners  
with their lonely ghosts  
one may purposefully retreat to.

**CREDITS AND THANK YOU!**

**MASTER OF CEREMONY**

Krys Holmes

**GUEST POET**

Chris La Tray

**JUDGES**

Mark Gibbons

Aaron Parrett

Caroline Patterson

Natalie Peeterse

**ACCURACY JUDGE**

Donna Davis

**SCORE TALLY**

Jenifer Alger

Ginny Newman

**PROMPTERS**

Kristin Han Burgoyne

Brian Moody

**PROGRAM DESIGN/  
MEDIA**

Eric Heidle

**TEACHER ASSISTANTS**

Scott Cooney

Alison Kreiss

Katrina Venters

**ASL INTERPRETATION**

Macy Henze

Dana Walls

**STUDENT ASSISTANT**

Maizy Parrett

**PHOTOGRAPHY**

Katie Knight

**VIDEOGRAPHY**

Helena Civic Television

**WITH SINCERE THANKS TO GRANDSTREET THEATRE FOR THEIR  
YEARS OF SUPPORTING MONTANA POETRY OUT LOUD**



**THANK YOU TO DRUMLUMMON INSTITUTE FOR  
SPONSORING THIS YEAR'S JUDGES' DINNER**

**DRUMLUMMON**  
INSTITUTE

# PAST STATE CHAMPIONS

## 2023

1. Wica-ta-wi Hoksina Brown *Polson High*
2. Hannah Ruth Davidson *Kalispell High*

## 2022

1. Rachel Campbell *The Chrysalis School*
2. Zoe Belinda *Red Lodge High*

## 2021

1. Brady Drummond *Belt High*
2. Anna Christensen *Flathead High*

## 2020

1. Isabella Shinn *Flathead High*
2. Katy McCumber *Butte High*

## 2019

1. Sophie Barth *Butte High*
2. Victoria Shelton *Belt High*

## 2018

1. Anna Hedinger *Flathead High*
2. Clint Connors *Butte High*

## 2017

1. Anaka Ronan *Helena High*
2. Claire Parsons *Hellgate High*

## 2016

1. Savannah Smith *Helena High*
2. Taylor Blossom *Capital High*

## 2015

1. Taylor Rogers *Willard Alternative*
2. Taylor Blossom *Capital High*

## 2014

1. Sowmya Sudhakar *Butte High*
2. Darcie Caldwell *Helena High*

## 2013

1. Taylor Blossom *Capital High*
2. Stella Shannon *Hellgate High*

## 2012

1. Austin Graef *Hellgate High*
2. Stella Shannon *Hellgate High*

## 2011

1. Stella Shannon *Hellgate High*
2. Bella DeLong *Helena High*

## 2010

1. Diego Steele *Sentinel High*
2. Bella DeLong *Helena High*

## 2009

1. Sara Larson *Butte High*
2. Adryan Kransky *Hellgate High*

## 2008

1. Amber Greymorning *Hellgate High*
2. Mike Zarling *Helena High*

## 2007

1. Josh Kelly *Flathead High*
2. Jana Barros *Helena High*

## 2006

1. Cassin LaFontaine *Helena High*
2. Christian Munck *Helena High*

## A TREMENDOUS THANK YOU TO ALL THE TEACHERS, PARENTS AND POETS WHO SUPPORTED THIS YEAR'S STATE FINALISTS!

According to John Hollander in *Committed to Memory*, long before there was writing, stories were kept alive through a cycle of reciting. Even after almost three millennia of written literature, poetry retains its appeal to the ear as well as the eye. To hear a poem read aloud by someone who understands it and who wishes to share that understanding can be a crucial experience.

ON THE COVER: Kenna Anderson of Flathead High School competes in the 2023 final. COVER PHOTO: Katie Knight

### A PROGRAM OF:



**Large  
Print**

This publication is available in large print or alternative format upon request.