East Moline teenager going to state to compete in POETRY!

Written by M. McNeil Friday, 01 March 2013 10:42

(East Moline, IL) You always hear about football and basketball players making it to state....well, now a United Township High School senior is going to state for her poetry recitation skills. Brianna Gray won the UT "Poetry Out Loud" competition earlier this month and won the Regional competition last Saturday. She will compete at the State competition on Friday, March 8th, in Springfield for a slot in the 2013 Poetry Out Loud: National Recitation Contest in Washington, D. C., in late April. This is her second trip to state finals for Poetry out Loud.

Brianna says to competing at the state level has boosted her confidence level because you have to believe in yourself when you are standing in front of hundreds of people. "I love poetry Out Loud because it has taught me how be confident in myself and that I am capable of great things. It has also taught me how to better understand poetry and to figure out what the poets were thinking when they wrote."

Brianna says her quest for state was helped along by UT staffers. "I have my school librarians who are always willing to lend me their ear and help me understand what that poem is actually about, I have other teachers who are able to listen and critique my performance so it can be the best version when I preform, and I also have my family who listens through countless run-throughs and makes sure I am accurate in my poems."

Students study, memorize, and recite renowned classic and contemporary poetry at each level of competition, and a panel of writers, teachers, and performers judges the recitations. Each state champion will receive a trip to the nation's capital to join a field of fifty-three students vying for the top prize, a \$20,000 scholarship award.

"UT is very excited to be taking poetry to the next level and representing the Western Illinois region at state finals. This is our 3rd year participating and going to state finals in this program and we've seen many positive things come from this experience for our students." says UT's Poetry Out Loud coordinator, Lisa Carroll.

The Springfield Area Arts Council will host sixteen high school students from eight regions spanning Illinois. They are the winners and runners-up from competitions held this month, starting in their own classrooms. Contest organizer, Sheila Walk, "This program gives teenagers a way to compete, just as school athletes do, and the competition at the state level is intense. Participating students master public speaking skills, build self-confidence, and learn about their literary heritage. Plus, they meet students from urban, suburban, and rural schools and interact with the judges who are language arts professionals. It's a great event." Poetry Out Loud is backed by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Poetry Foundation. Now in its eighth year, the contest is designed to encourage interest in poetry at the high school level. Last year, almost 6,000 students from 57 Illinois public and private high schools participated.

UT's Poetry Outloud is an afterschool enrichment class which is part of a "Lights ON" grant funded by the 21st CCLC grant, a partnership between the Rock Island County Regional Office of Education and UTHS.

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