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**NEW MEXICO STATE CHAMPION WILL TAKE PART IN THE FINALS OF
POETRY OUT LOUD: NATIONAL RECITATION CONTEST IN WASHINGTON DC**

Santa Fe, NM – Michelle Zhou, a senior from La Cueva High School in Albuquerque, will represent New Mexico for the second year in a row in the national finals of *Poetry Out Loud: National Recitation Contest* April 25-26, in Washington DC.

Zhou, 17, beat out six other finalists on Sunday, March 12, 2017 in the 12th Annual New Mexico State Finals of *Poetry Out Loud*, sponsored by New Mexico Arts, the state arts agency and a division of the Department of Cultural Affairs.

Zhou receives \$200 and an all-expense paid trip with chaperone to Washington DC to represent New Mexico at the national finals. Her school will receive a \$500 stipend to purchase poetry books for the school library.

“The New Mexico Poetry Out Loud State Championship is about more than just competition,” said Governor Susana Martinez. “It’s about embracing the spirit of poetry and building on our state’s centuries-old legacy of art and literature. This program helps high school students master public speaking skills, build self-confidence and learn about our literary heritage.”

The Governor noted that this year, 1,202 students and 19 teachers from across New Mexico took part in Poetry Out Loud. “I want to thank all the teachers, students and families who help make Poetry Out Loud such a success – and for working to promote literacy in New Mexico,” Governor Martinez said. “Poetry Out Loud helps bring people together to strengthen our communities and our state.”



Photo by Tim Keller: 2017
New Mexico Poetry Out
Loud State Champion
Michelle Zhou, 17, of La
Cueva High School in
Albuquerque

Other finalists who participated included: runner-up Juan Andres Rodriguez, Public Academy for Performing Arts, Albuquerque; third place, D’Nessa McDaniel, Highland High School, Albuquerque; Lizzy

Enos, Bosque School, Albuquerque; Daimon Sisneros, Maxwell Municipal Schools; Verona Gomez, Oñate High School, Las Cruces; and Julia Johnson-Jaramillo, Taos High School.

Special guest state Senator Bill O’Neill of Albuquerque, charmed the audience of about 100 with a recitation of an original poem. Special guest Hakim Bellamy, Albuquerque’s inaugural poet laureate and host of the ¡Colores! public television program, recited a Lucille Clifton poem from the Poetry Out Loud anthology then brought the house down with a recitation of his original poem titled “Celebration” in response to Ms. Clifton’s [if momma / could see].

The *Poetry Out Loud* National Finals will take place in Washington DC at the Lisner Auditorium on the campus of The George Washington University on April 25-26, 2017. On April 25, students grouped in three geographic regions will compete in semifinal competitions. Nine students (three from each region) will advance to compete in the National Finals on April 26. Judges will evaluate each student performance on criteria including physical presence, articulation, evidence of understanding, and accuracy.

The state final was sponsored in part by Bookworks on Rio Grande, Collected Works, Doodlets of Santa Fe, Gloria Lopez & Gene Ortega, HELP NM Inc., Hemp Santa Fe, Swimming With Elephants Publications, Trader Joe’s, and Trish Romero of Doterra Essential Oils.

[Poetry Out Loud](#) is a partnership of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the Poetry Foundation and state arts agencies. The New Mexico portion of the national poetry recitation contest is sponsored by New Mexico Arts, a division of the New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs.

Poetry Out Loud encourages high school students to learn about great poetry through memorization and performance and is the creation of the NEA and the Poetry Foundation. New Mexico students were among the approximately 365,000 students nationwide who took part this year at the classroom level.

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[New Mexico Arts](#), a division of the Department of Cultural Affairs, is the state arts agency. *New Mexico Arts administers the state’s One Percent for Public Art program, awards grants to nonprofit organizations for arts and cultural programs in their communities across the state, and provides technical assistance and educational opportunities for organizations, artists, and arts educators throughout New Mexico.*

The [National Endowment for the Arts](#) is a public agency dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts – both new and established – bringing the arts to all Americans, and providing leadership in arts education. *Established by Congress in 1965 as an independent agency of the federal government, the Endowment is the nation’s largest annual funder of the arts, bringing great art to all 50 states, including rural areas, inner cities and military bases.*

The [Poetry Foundation](#), publisher of Poetry magazine, is an independent literary organization committed to a vigorous presence for poetry in our culture. *It has embarked on an ambitious plan to bring the best poetry before the largest possible audience.*