

NEARTS

A GREAT NATION DESERVES GREAT ART

Poetry Out Loud 2006 National Finals

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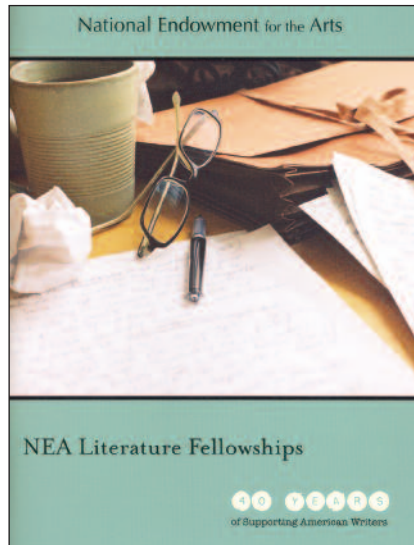


The NEA and Literature

Nurturing the Love of Language

This edition of NEA Arts focuses on the National Endowment for the Arts's continuing support and nurturing of American literature. Since its creation in 1965, the Arts Endowment has played an important role in the development of American creative writing. The NEA began a formal program to support writers in 1967 with grants to such noted authors as Hayden Carruth, Robert Duncan, Tillie Olsen, Grace Paley, Richard Yates, and Isaac Bashevis Singer. From that time to today, the NEA has been committed to aiding the individual writer.

To celebrate this invaluable investment in American creativity, the NEA produced a publication on the program: *NEA Literature Fellowships: 40 Years of Supporting*



American Writers, which includes the names of all the writers and translators who have received grants to advance their art.

The Arts Endowment also funds nonprofit literary institutions for activities such as publishing by small presses and literary journals, reading series, book festivals, author residencies and workshops, book distribution projects, and more. Today, more than 100 literary organizations receive approximately \$1.5 million from the

NEA annually to support American literature.

The NEA supports American literature not only with grants to writers and literary organizations, but also through National Initiatives aimed at developing a new



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ON THE COVER:

Jackson Hille, a senior at Columbus Alternative High School, won the national title during the Poetry Out Loud National Finals in Washington, DC. Photo: James Kegley.

"There's no substitute for the love of language, for the beauty of an English sentence."

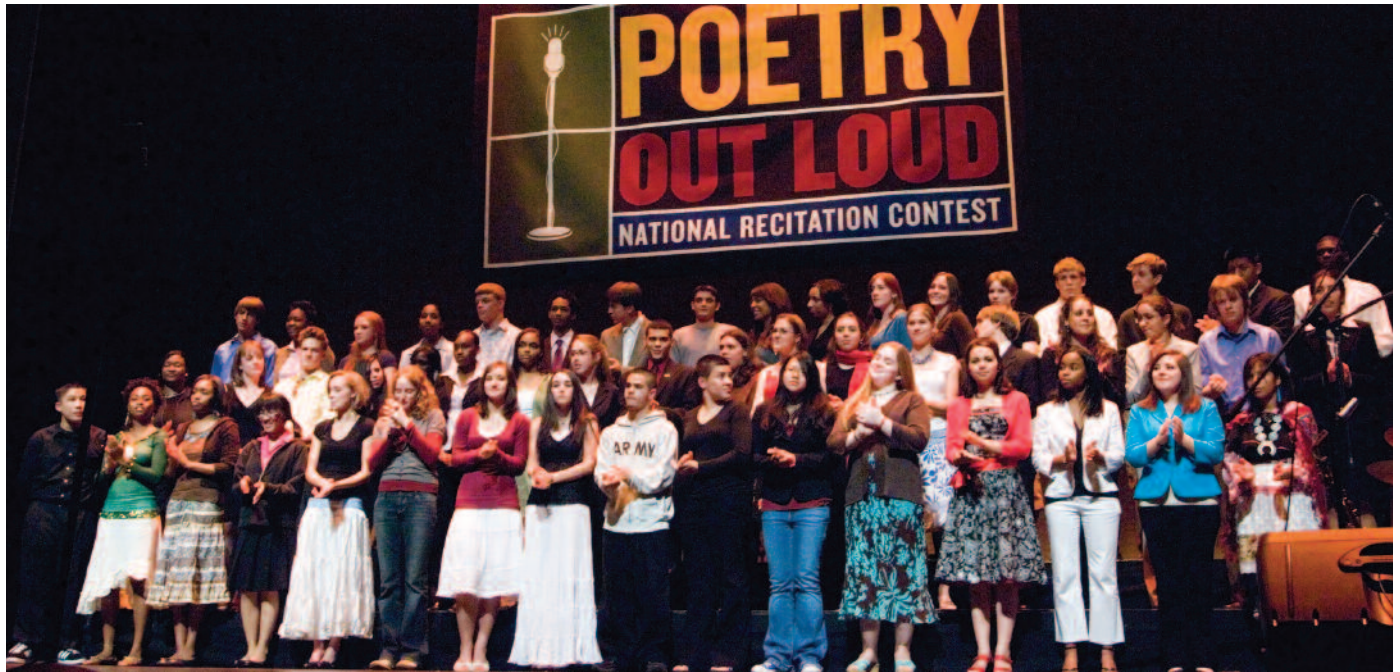
—Harper Lee

generation of readers. Poetry Out Loud encourages the nation's youth to learn about poetry through memorization and performance. The Big Read was developed to revitalize the role of reading in American public culture, which, according to the 2004 landmark NEA research report *Reading at Risk*, has been in decline over the past 20 years. Both of these initiatives are featured in this edition of NEA Arts.

Literature provides a cultural text of a country's life and history. Just as Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* provided an extraordinary glimpse into post-slavery 19th-century America that few history books could achieve, today's emerging writers provide a compelling view of the diverse American culture in the 21st century to future readers. It is necessary, however, that there actually be future readers. To that end, the NEA is dedicated to stemming the decline in literary reading and encouraging citizens to read for pleasure and enlightenment.

Making Poetry Come Alive

Poetry Out Loud 2006 National Finals



The 2006 State Champions of the Poetry Out Loud National Recitation Contest. Photo: James Kegley.

The gold-swagged stage of Washington, DC’s historic Lincoln Theater—once host to the likes of Billie Holiday and Duke Ellington—resounded with a different type of music on May 16, 2006, as 51 teens competed in the first national poetry recitation contest. Poetry Out Loud, a National Initiative of the NEA in partnership with the Poetry Foundation, fosters the next generation of literary readers by capitalizing on the latest trends in poetry—recitation and performance. The program was expanded to a national contest this year after a successful pilot phase in 2005 that featured competitions in the Washington, DC area and in Chicago.

Over the past year, high school students from all 50 states and the District of Columbia competed at the school and state levels in contests sponsored in collaboration with the state arts agencies. The NEA and the Poetry Foundation provided free standards-based curriculum materials for use by participating schools, including print and online poetry anthologies, a teacher’s guide, and a CD of recited poems featuring well-known actors and writers. Each state champion received a \$200 cash award, \$500 for his or her school library to purchase poetry books, and an all-expenses paid trip to the nation’s capital

to compete in the national finals, administered by the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation.

The NEA hosted the 51 champions for a full schedule of events. Arriving in Washington the night before the semifinal and final competitions, the competitors and their chaperones enjoyed a welcome banquet. The next morning, the young people were feted on Capitol Hill at a breakfast with members of Congress, including Senators Daniel Akaka (Hawaii), Robert Bennett (Utah), Conrad Burns (Montana), Mark Dayton (Minnesota), Johnny Isakson (Georgia), Lisa Murkowski (Alaska), Jack Reed (Rhode Island), Ted Stevens (Alaska), Craig Thomas (Wyoming), and John Thune (South Dakota), and Representatives Shelley Moore Capito (West Virginia) and Betty McCollum (Minnesota).

Later that day, three regional semifinal rounds, in which competitors each recited two poems, yielded 12 finalists. Judges rated each performer on several factors including diction, speed, volume, and overall presentation. Participants recited poems ranging from Mary Howitt’s humorous fable “The Spider and the Fly” to Rhina P. Espailat’s poignant meditation on multiculturalism “Bilingual/Bilingüe.”

Several poems proved quite popular, and the judges were treated to multiple renditions. Lewis Carroll’s “Jabberwocky,” Maya Angelou’s “Still I Rise,” and Allen



Second place winner Teal Van Dyck, a senior at Bow High School in New Hampshire, performing in the final round of the Poetry Out Loud National Finals. Third place went to Kelli Taulia Anae, a senior at the Mid Pacific Institute in Hawaii. Photos: James Kegley.

Ginsberg's "A Supermarket in California" each received four recitations.

Semifinal judge Sunil Iyengar, poetry editor and reviewer, noted, "Hearing the same poem done so many ways awakens your sense of the poem itself. You get an appreciation of the spoken and written word at the same time."

The day's events culminated in an exciting final round of competition that evening. As the curtain rose to reveal all 51 champions, an appreciative capacity crowd filled the Lincoln Theater and burst into applause and a standing ovation.

NEA Chairman Dana Gioia opened the finals, asserting that the program's aims were both artistic and practical. "Poetry Out Loud brings great language into our hearts, minds, and imaginations. But it also teaches our young people to speak with confidence in public."

Chairman Gioia went on to note that each of the 12 finalists had beat tremendous odds to make it to the final rounds of the competition. "When you consider that these finalists started at the state level with a field of 120,000, you realize that each has beat 10,000 to 1 odds, not on chance but on skill, to be here tonight."

Joining Chairman Gioia for opening remarks was Poetry Foundation president John Barr, who said, "Our common interest in seeing poetry flourish inspired our

partnership with the NEA. To borrow from Robert Frost, poetry is 'a diminished thing' if it's not shared."

Scott Simon, host of National Public Radio's *Weekend Edition*, was the evening's emcee. He applauded the high school students for their participation in the program, saying, "At no other time in your lives will words sink more deeply into your bones." He added that speaking poetry out loud was important because "each time we hear someone recite a poem, we begin to understand what it is about the poem we find interesting."

The 12 finalists competed before a panel of illustrious judges: writer, lawyer, and poetry advocate Caroline Kennedy; *Washington Post* book critic Michael Dirda; author and professor Azar Nafisi; novelist Curtis Sittenfeld; and poet, critic, and former NEA deputy chairman A.B. Spellman.

After two rounds, the 12 finalists were whittled down to five: Kellie Taulia Anae (Hawaii), Ryan Arthur Berry (North Dakota), Jackson Hille (Ohio), Aislinn Lowry (Missouri), and Teal Van Dyck (New Hampshire). The five young people competed in a third round, and Ohio's Hille was awarded top honors and a \$20,000 college scholarship after delivering Billy Collins's "Forgetfulness." Second place went to Teal Van Dyck, who received a \$10,000 college scholarship, and Kellie Taulia Anae came in third, receiving a \$5,000 scholarship. Each of the other 12 finalists will receive \$1,000 in scholarship money, and all of the finalists's schools will receive \$500 for the purchase of poetry books.

The next day, Hille met with Ohio Representatives

Deborah Pryce and Patrick Tiberi, who had been the emcee at Ohio's state competition. Rep. Pryce stated, "Jackson is a dynamic and sensationally talented young man. He is a tremendous ambassador for central Ohio."

Hille says he got involved with the program when a teacher offered him extra credit to participate, but his

involvement soon became about more than grades. "As I kept winning competitions, I realized that poetry was a powerful thing, that the person reciting the poem is a vessel between the poem and the audience."

More information about Poetry Out Loud can be found at www.poetryoutloud.org.

An Interview with Jackson Hille, Poetry Out Loud National Champion

The following is an excerpt from an interview with Ohio high school senior Jackson Hille after winning the Poetry Out Loud 2006 National Finals.

NEA: How did you choose the poems you recited in competition?

HILLE: Well, I'm an actor, and in theater auditions it's best to have monologues that play to your strengths, that you have a special connection with, and that show a variety of topics and time periods. I chose my poems based on the same standards. My poems all had a way of using humor to deal with a more serious underlying topic, which is a trick I use to stay sane too.

NEA: How have your feelings about poetry changed since being involved in Poetry Out Loud?

HILLE: Before the competition poetry was strictly for bedtime stories for kids. I had never taken a poem seriously outside of a literature class before. It's something that I've come to love, and I'll incorporate it into whatever I do.

NEA: What is the most important thing that you've gained from participating in the program?

HILLE: Other than \$20,000 I would have to say the relationship I gained with "my" poems. They're always going to be with me from now on ... It's like being able to remember every word of your favorite book and dive into it anytime.



U.S. Representative Deborah Pryce of Ohio congratulates POL National Champion Jackson Hille in her DC office. Photo: Peter Freeman.

NEA: How did you feel when your name was announced as the national winner?

HILLE: Relieved. All I could think of before they called me was how many awkward phone calls I was going to have to make telling everyone that I didn't win. Once they called my name I was so taken aback that it took about two hours to fully realize what had happened. I think that I should give credit where credit is due. Both of my teachers, Jamie Foley and Lynn Darke, were amazingly supportive and my family deserves thanks just for putting up with me for 18 years.

Uniting Communities Through Reading

The Arts Endowment Launches the Big Read



“We want people of all ages across the country to enjoy the social aspects of reading and the enthusiasm that’s generated by discussing a good book in a library, with a neighbor, a classmate, or a co-worker.”

That’s how Chairman Dana Gioia describes the aims of the Big Read, a new national reading program by the NEA based on popular citywide reading programs and designed to revitalize the role of reading in American life. The Big Read will involve more than 100 communities—large and small—from across the United States, each coming together to read and celebrate a classic American novel.

In May, from the Weill Recital Hall stage at New York’s Carnegie Hall, the Chairman announced the launch of the Big Read to an audience of publishers, writers, educators, librarians, and press. Joining Chairman Gioia for the announcement was Dr. Anne-Imelda M. Radice, Director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). The NEA’s lead partner in the program, IMLS has pledged \$1 million to support the participation of local libraries in the program.

“Libraries are ‘information central’ in communities everywhere,” noted Dr. Radice. “Encouraging library

NEA Chairman Gioia introduces the launch of the Big Read initiative in New York City. Photo: Tom Pich.

participation will assure that the Big Read has big impact in cities and towns across the United States.”

Additional program partners include The Boeing Company, which will support the program on military bases and surrounding communities. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Community Foundations of America also will support the Big Read through a matching grants program.

Former Colorado Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder, now President and CEO of the Association of American Publishers, praised the program at the launch event. “We applaud the National Endowment for the Arts for raising public awareness of the serious decline in literary readership in this country and for taking positive steps to stem and reverse that decline... We know that books are magical: they can be powerful forces for changing lives; they can be just plain fun!”

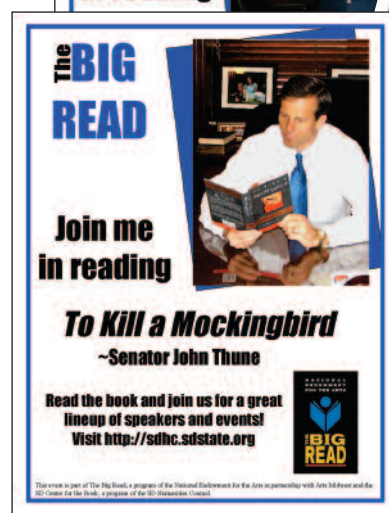
“I’m not a betting man, but I’d wager those who join the Big Read will be hooked on the joys of great literature,” added Chairman Gioia.



Members of the Huntsville Swing Dance Society enjoy the Roaring '20s celebration as part of the Big Read activities for the community reading of *The Great Gatsby*. Photo by Ellen Hudson, courtesy of *The Huntsville Times*. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.

Excitement over the Big Read grew from the startling figures in *Reading at Risk*, which documented a dramatic decline in literary reading among all age groups, ethnic groups, and education levels. Even more disturbing, the report showed that a decline in reading paralleled a retreat from participation in civic and cultural life.

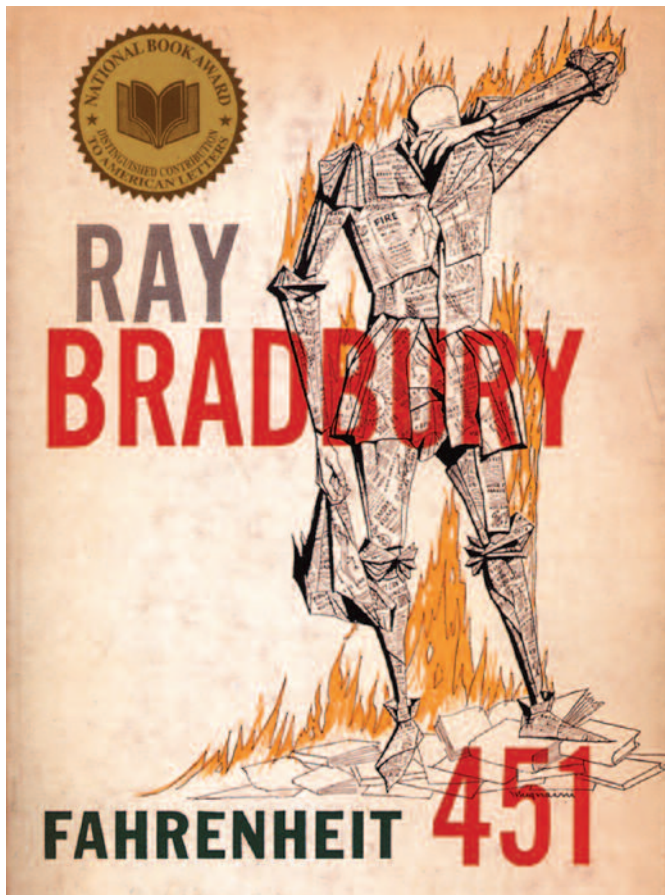
In December 2005, the Arts Endowment kicked off the pilot phase of the Big Read with managing support from Arts Midwest. Ten communities—ranging in size from rural Enterprise, Oregon, with a population of fewer than 2,000, to the metropolis of Miami and Dade Counties, Florida, to the entire state of Arkansas—received grants of up to \$40,000 to facilitate month-long community-wide reading programs. Each community chose one of four classic novels: Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, or Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. (**Uniting Communities** continued on page 9)



South Dakota Senators Tim Johnson and John Thune and Representative Stephanie Herseht encourage the Sioux Falls community to participate in reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* as part of the Big Read. Posters courtesy of the South Dakota Center for the Book.

Creating *Fahrenheit 451*

Dana Gioia Interviews Author Ray Bradbury



Cover used with permission of Del Ray/The Random House Ballantine Publishing Group.

On January 5, 2005, NEA Chairman Dana Gioia interviewed Ray Bradbury in Los Angeles about his book *Fahrenheit 451*, one of the books featured in the *Big Read*. An excerpt from their conversation follows.

GIOIA: How did you come to write *Fahrenheit 451*?

BRADBURY: In 1950, our first baby was born, and in 1951, our second, so our house was getting full of children. It was very loud, it was very wonderful, but I had no money to rent an office. I was wandering around the UCLA library and discovered there was a typing room where you could rent a typewriter for ten cents a half-hour. So I went and got a bag of dimes. The novel began that day, and nine days later it was finished. But my God, what a place to write that book! I ran up and down stairs and grabbed books off the shelf to find any kind of quote and ran back down and put it in the

novel. The book wrote itself in nine days, because the library told me to do it.

GIOIA: What was the origin of the idea of books being burned in the novel?

BRADBURY: Well, Hitler of course. When I was 15, he burnt the books in the streets of Berlin. Then along the way I learned about the libraries in Alexandria burning five thousand years ago. That grieved my soul. Since I'm self-educated, that means my educators—the libraries—are in danger. And if it could happen in Alexandria, if it could happen in Berlin, maybe it could happen somewhere up ahead, and my heroes would be killed.

GIOIA: Decades after *Fahrenheit 451*, do you feel that you predicted the world, in that sense, fairly accurately?

BRADBURY: Oh, God. I've never believed in prediction. That's other people's business, someone like H.G. Wells with *The Shape of Things to Come*. I've said it often: I've tried not to predict, but to protect and to prevent. If I can go to the library and be sensible, without pontificating and without being self-conscious, that's fine. I can teach people to really know they're alive.

GIOIA: Did you think of this book from the beginning being about the growth, the transformation of Montag's character?

BRADBURY: Never for a moment. No. Everything just has to happen because it has to happen. The wonderful irony of the book is that Montag is educated by a teenager. She doesn't know what she is doing. She is a bit of a romantic sap, and she wanders through the world. She's really alive though, you see. That is what is attractive about her. And Montag is attracted to her romantic sappiness.

GIOIA: What do you think the turning point is in this novel, in terms of making Montag come into his new life?

BRADBURY: Well, when Mrs. Hudson is willing to burn with her books. That's the turning point, when it's all over and she's willing to die with her loved ones, with her dogs, with her cats, with her books. She gives up her life. She'd rather die than be without them.

GIOIA: If you joined the community that appears at the end of *Fahrenheit 451* and had to commit one book to memory, what book would that be?

BRADBURY: It would be *A Christmas Carol*. I think that book has influenced my life more than almost any other

book, because it's a book about life, it's a book about death. It's a book about triumph.

GIOIA: Why should people read novels?

BRADBURY: Because we are trying to solve the mystery of our loves, no matter what kind you have. Quite often there's an end to it and you have to find a new love. We move from novel to novel.

(**Uniting Communities** continued from page 7)

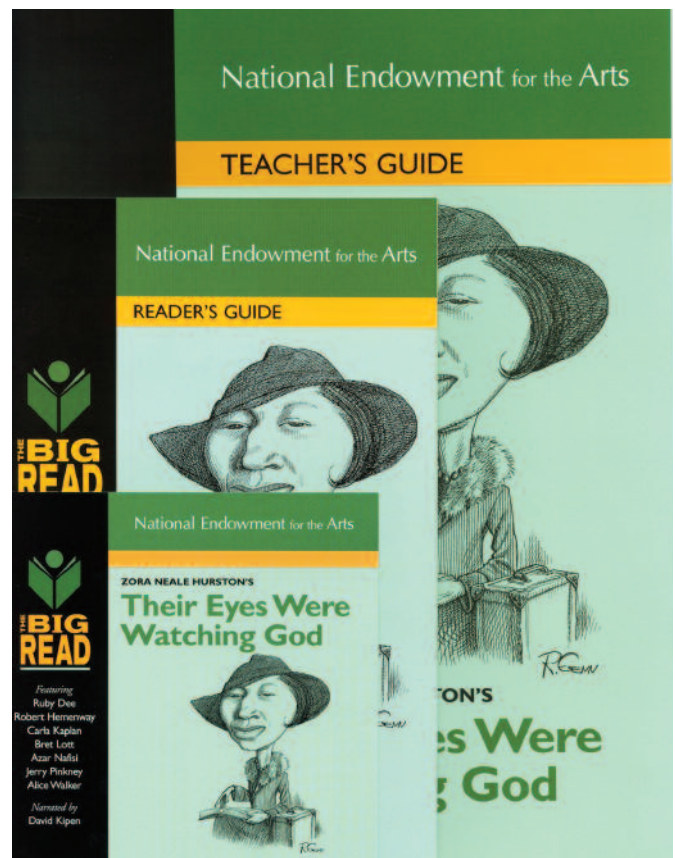
(Four additional novels will be available for the January 2007 start of the full program: Willa Cather's *My Antonia*, Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*.)

As part of the Big Read, the NEA will provide communities with reader's and teacher's guides for each novel and advertising materials including posters and television public service announcements. Communities also will receive audio guide CDs with commentary on each novel by luminaries such as actors Robert Redford and Robert Duvall and retired Supreme Court justice Sandra Day O'Connor.

As with the pilot communities, it will be left to each city to plan specific activities around each novel based on events, venues, and materials unique to its region. For instance, visitors to Boise, Idaho's hands-on science museum experienced an exhibit featuring technology prefigured in *Fahrenheit 451*. In Sioux City, South Dakota, a dramatization of the courtroom scene in *To Kill a Mockingbird* was well attended by the community. To kick off the citywide reading of *The Great Gatsby*, the Huntsville-Madison County Public Library in Alabama sponsored a "Roaring '20s" street party. Many of the pilot communities also hosted read-a-thons with local celebrities, including one at a local Krispy Kreme store. Additional community events ranged from film screenings to discussion groups to the distribution of free books to theater performances and recitations.

Marie Pyko, public services manager at the Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library and one of the organizers of Topeka's Big Read of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,

Audio guides, reader's guides, and teacher's guides are part of the Big Read initiative.



spoke at the May launch about her experience with the program. She reported that the level of community involvement in the program was astounding. "The Big Read inspired more than 155 community groups to participate. Our online survey was filled out by more than 5,000 participants, and the surveys keep coming in."

Proposals are currently being accepted for the next phase of the Big Read. For more information or to apply, please visit www.neabigread.org.

Connecting Lines Across Borders

NEA Forms Partnership To Release New Bilingual Poetry Anthology

The Cultural Institute of Mexico in

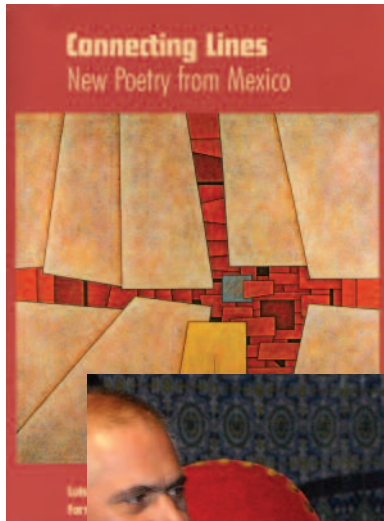
Washington, DC and the NEA celebrated the release of the two-volume bilingual poetry anthology *Connecting Lines: New Poetry from Mexico* and *Líneas Conectadas: nueva poesía de los Estados Unidos* with a reading by several of the anthology's featured writers. Mexican poets Elsa Cross and Pedro Serrano and U.S. poet Diane Thiel joined Chairman Dana Gioia for the reading at which each poet recited his or her work in both Spanish and English.

The April 19 event was the first stop on a reading tour to Texas, New Mexico, and California.

The idea for the anthology germinated in 2003 at a meeting involving the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities and Mexico's arts and humanities council. The NEA, the U.S. Embassy in Mexico, and the National Autonomous University of Mexico partnered to bring the project to fruition. Published by Sarabande Books, each volume contains the work of 50 poets from the postwar generation writing in diverse styles. U.S. poets whose work appears in the anthology include former U.S. Poet Laureate Rita Dove and Pulitzer Prize winner Yusef Komunyakaa.

April Lindner was the editor tasked with choosing the work for *Lineas Conectadas*, the U.S. volume of the anthology. She explains, "I chose poems I imagined would travel well—that describe a thin slice of contemporary American life in the rich specificity that magically makes the local universal."

Chairman Gioia affirmed that the anthologies illus-



Luis Cortés Bargalló and April Lindner, editors of the two-volume bilingual poetry anthology *Connecting Lines*, featuring poetry from Mexican and United States poets, at the book launch at the Cultural Institute of Mexico in Washington, DC. Photo: Liz Stark.

trate the deep connection that has always existed between the two nations. In his introduction to *Lineas Conectadas*, he notes, "As a Mexican-American born and raised in a Southern California neighborhood where about half

the population spoke Spanish, I observed, even as a child, the complex but essentially familial link being formed between Mexico and the U.S."

Hernán Lara Zavala, the Mexican author who conceived the project with

Gioia, considers the anthologies an important vehicle for building understanding between the two neighbors. "Culture has the advantage of being inclusive, tolerant, generous, spontaneous, democratic, and vital and perhaps is the best medium to bring together two nations as different as Mexico and the U.S. ... allowing both countries to be better understood through the fine sensibility and keen perception of poetry."

Pedro Serrano, Diane Thiel, and Elsa Cross are three of the poets featured in the two-volume bilingual poetry anthology, *Connecting Lines*. Photo: Liz Stark.



In the News

NEA Grants Workshop in Ohio



Paul Redman, Executive Director, Franklin Park Conservatory; U.S. Representative Patrick Tiberi of Ohio; Wayne Lawson, Executive Director, Ohio Arts Council; and Chairman Gioia at the NEA grants workshop in Columbus, Ohio. Photo: Shana Chase.

New National Council on the Arts member Representative Patrick Tiberi of Ohio's 12th District hosted the Arts Endowment for a grants workshop on February 22nd in Columbus. Held at the Franklin Park Conservatory, the event attracted 100 participants from local arts organizations including Paul Redman, the conservatory's executive director, and Wayne Lawson, executive director of the Ohio Arts Council.

Chairman Dana Gioia kicked off the workshop by congratulating Rep. Tiberi on his arts leadership and applauding the many outstanding arts organizations in the Columbus area. Chairman Gioia then spoke about the Arts Endowment's leadership role in the area of arts education, citing in particular the agency's Shakespeare for a New Generation, NEA Jazz in the Schools, and Poetry Out Loud programs.

Rep. Tiberi also spoke about the importance of arts education. "I've experienced first hand the impact that the arts can have. As a youngster, I began playing the trumpet. I continued through high school and later as a member of the Ohio State University Marching Band. Not only did music provide me with a means of self expression, but it allowed me to build relationships that I continue to enjoy."

Following the opening remarks, Tony Chauveaux, the NEA's Deputy Chairman for Grants & Awards, led the

hour-long grants workshop. During the workshop, local arts organizations learned the ins and outs of applying for federal arts funding, including eligibility requirements, deadlines, and how to participate in agency initiatives.

Chairman Testifies on Budget

On March 29, 2006, Chairman Gioia testified before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies in support of President Bush's FY 2007 \$124,412,000 budget request for the agency. Chairman Gioia reported on the success of Arts Endowment programs, including ongoing initiatives such as Shakespeare in American Communities and Poetry Out Loud.

Challenge America: Reaching Every Community was cited as one of the agency's most successful grant programs. Chairman Gioia reported, "In 2006 we will again achieve our goal of reaching every community in the United States—with many grants once again going to organizations that have never before received Endowment support."

The FY 07 budget includes \$44,904,000 for direct grants, \$29,964,000 for state and regional partnerships, and \$14,097,000 for Challenge America. Nearly \$10 million is earmarked for American Masterpieces: Three Centuries of Artistic Genius, a touring program that combines local presentations of the best of America's creative legacy in all artistic genres with educational programming. The House also has approved a \$5 million increase to the Arts Endowment budget.



2006 NATIONAL FINALS

Top row: Montana Senator Conrad Burns with Cassin LaFountaine, Montana Poetry Out Loud State Champion ; Senator Lisa Murkowski, Alaska State Champion Naphtali Leyland Fields, and Senator Ted Stevens. **Middle row:** New Mexico State Champion Fantasia Lonjose; Massachusetts State Champion Vinh Hua; Nebraska State Champion Shuqiao Song. **Bottom row:** Senator Johnny Isakson and Georgia State Champion Michelle Arielle McIntyre; Minnesota State Champion Tottiana Adams and Rep. Betty McCollum. Photos: James Kegley.

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