

# Poetry Out Loud contest nurtures love of written word



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**By Peggy McGlone | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com**

NEWARK — Ten New Jersey high school students showcased the power of poetry Friday, finding the humor and heartbreak, the rhythm and melody in 29 works they recited from memory at the New Jersey Poetry Out Loud State Finals.

Natasha Vargas delivered a musical tour de force of Jack Collom's "Ecology" and an emotional rendition of "A Locked House," Pulitzer Prize-winning W.D. Snodgrass' meditation on a failed marriage. The Lawrence High School senior was crowned state champion.

"It's not teaching poetry, it's experiencing poetry," Cinnaminson High School teacher Amy O'Hearn said about the national program, a partnership between the National Endowment of the Arts and the Poetry Foundation.

O'Hearn and retired colleague Judy Brangan were in the audience to cheer on Ashley Ungvarsky, the second state finalist from Cinnaminson High School in five years.

Friday's competition was the last one of a series that began September and drew 28,618 students from 148 schools in the state. The 10 finalists won contests in their classroom, school and regions before taking the stage at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark. Vargas' victory earned her \$200 and a trip to Washington, D.C., next month to represent the state in the national round.

This year's judges were poets Paola Corso and Monica Youn, writer and Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey associate artistic director James Glossman, author Benilde Little. Danielle Constance served as the accuracy judge.