

SIERRA STAR

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EDUCATION

Students recite poetry 'out loud'

Yosemite High School's Kelley Harrison headed to state finals

By Elizabeth Gabriel

(Updated Friday, February 23, 2007, 2:42 PM)

Kelley Harrison of Yosemite High School will represent Madera County in the Poetry Out Loud state finals in Sacramento March 23. She took top honors Feb. 15 in competition at YHS that included students from Madera High School.

At the county level, Poetry Out Loud requires that students memorize, then present two poems. They're judged on criteria including the level of difficulty, evidence of understanding and overall performance of the poems they've chosen to recite.

"It's really thrilling and exciting to be included in this competition," said host Mary Lee Gowland, Madera County coordinator for California Poets in the Schools. It was she who selected the county finalists from more than 80 students who auditioned. She expects to expand to include high schools in Madera Ranchos and Chowchilla for next year's competition.

"The Yosemite students really shone, but everybody deserves recognition," she said.

Kelley recited "Ballad of Birmingham" and "The Gift."

"Ballad," by Dudley Randall, tells the story of a little girl who asks her mother for permission to go out to a freedom march in the Alabama city. But her mother is afraid the child might be harmed by the dogs, the guns, the violence, so insists the child go to church where she will be safe. The church is bombed, and the child dies.



The regional winners of Poetry Out Loud include (from left to right): Nicole Rogers, Yosemite High School, second place; Karamjot Kaur, Madera High School, third place (tie); Kelley Harrison, Yosemite High School, first place; and Tasha Boyd, Yosemite High School, third place (tie).

Photo courtesy of Mary Lee Gowland



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"The Gift," by Li-Young Lee is about a child's love for her father, told from the memory of how the father removed a metal sliver from the child's hand.

In the Sacramento competition, Kelly will have to recite three pieces. She will be up against winners from nine other competitions in the state.

Second-place winner was Nicole Rogers, also of YHS. Third place was a tie for Tasha Boyd of YHS and Karamjot Kaur of Madera High.

Prizes were \$250 for first place, \$100 for second and \$50 for third. Funding was donated by Sierra Telephone Co.

Judging was done by Richard Hoffman, who has taught speech and theater and has been involved in local theater; Sybil Ashley, an Oakhurst poet with training in ballet and theater; and Corrinne Hales, a Fresno poet who has published several books and won numerous prizes for her work.

Gowland has several books to her credit, most recently "Surprise Yourself! Fun Writing Exercises for Today's Kids."

Poetry Out Loud is a national recitation competition sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Poetry Foundation. The state winner will compete in Washington, D.C. Last year's winner received a \$20,000 scholarship and performed for members of Congress.

Other Yosemite High School students who competed were Alisa Choin, Winnie Cunningham, Ben Hand and Sierra Strobel. While the judges were tallying their scores, YHS students recited some of their own poetry.



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