



EVENT PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY YOUTH POET LAUREATE FINALISTS SELECTED

One Finalist Will Be Awarded as the First Youth Poet Laureate

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY, California — Santa Cruz Public Libraries and the Santa Cruz County Poet Laureate (SCCPL), in partnership with Urban Word, are proud to announce the inaugural cohort of five finalists for Santa Cruz County Youth Poet Laureate (2024-2025). The finalists are Madeline Aliah, Simon Ellefson, Sylvi Kayser, Dina Lusztiq, and Gregory Souza.

The selection process took place over the last several months, in events which included optional drop-in workshops on writing, resume-crafting, and poetry performance, all sponsored by Santa Cruz Public Libraries and with support from the Watsonville Library. Four judges read the entire applicant pool, selected the finalists by committee and will meet individually with each finalist on March 23rd. These judges are: Farnaz Fatemi, SCCPL; Jennifer Ruby, poet & San Lorenzo Valley H.S. teacher; Julia Chiapella, poet & educator; and Tashi Liem, SCHS grad and 2023 Poetry Out Loud Santa Cruz County champion.

The Youth Poet Laureate acts as an advocate and county ambassador for poetry, social action and civic engagement. They will champion their own poetic practice while encouraging their peers to take part in the artform through readings, workshops and appearances at events throughout the county. Finalists will also have opportunities to read and support their peers along with the Youth Poet Laureate, in order to strengthen ties across the county and nurture a community of young poets.

Applicants submitted five original poems and a resumé or brag sheet. Each finalist will also be asked to read one of their poems in person for the judges. All finalists receive a \$100 cash honorarium with the Youth Poet Laureate receiving \$500. All finalists will also receive a gift card donated by Two Birds Books.

“I was delighted by the caliber and passion of all our applicants this inaugural year, and I’m especially gratified that we were able to name these five youth poets as our cohort.” said Santa Cruz County Poet Laureate Farnaz Fatemi, who facilitated the development of the Youth Poet Laureate program. “It is clear they have each found ways to use poetry to



make their own lives more meaningful, and that they will serve, in individual ways, to support their peers and our broader community. I'm so excited to see how that will unfold. I am also deeply grateful to a host of local organizations who have given or pledged support for this program as we build it. This includes, of course, the Santa Cruz Public Libraries for housing the program long-term, but also the County Office of Education, the Arts Council of Santa Cruz County and the Rotary Club of Santa Cruz. All these organizations share the vision of sustaining a community of civic-minded teen poets who can support each other countywide." Fatemi concludes.

The Santa Cruz County Youth Poet Laureate (2024-2025) will be named at a free celebration at the Kuumbwa Jazz Center on Wednesday, April 10 at 6:00 pm. All are welcome to [reserve their seat here](#).

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ABOUT THE SANTA CRUZ PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM:

Santa Cruz Public Libraries (SCPL) brings people, information, and resources together to enrich lives and strengthen the community. SCPL gives every Santa Cruz community member the opportunity to learn through educational resources, classes, and staff support. The Library develops programs for the broad community as well as for specific groups like students, seniors, and those who are most vulnerable, including the unhoused and incarcerated. SCPL also curates specialty collections, like genealogy and local history. Learn more about SCPL at [SantaCruzPL.org](https://www.santacruzpl.org) or on social media. To access the SCPL Press Kit visit <https://www.santacruzpl.org/press-kit/>.