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55 high school students from across the country performed at the 35th Annual National Shakespeare Competition in New York City

April 24, 2018 — *New York City*: April 23 may have been a normal Monday for most of America, but as the birthday of William Shakespeare and the date of the 35th Annual National Shakespeare Competition, April 23, 2018 will be a day that fifty-five high school students will never forget. On Monday, students from around the US competed on stage in the Mitzi Newhouse Theater at Lincoln Center as the culmination of a year-long competition hosted by the English-Speaking Union (ESU).

Each year, more than 20,000 high school students participate in the English in Action National Shakespeare Competition at the school, regional and national levels through the help of more than 2,500 teachers and 55 ESU branches nationwide. As part of the competition, students perform a monologue and recite a sonnet from Shakespeare and are judged on their understanding of their selected texts and on their ability to communicate their interpretation to the audience. Through this school-based program, students in grades 9-12 develop critical thinking and speaking skills and increase their self-confidence through performance of Shakespeare's work.

Since 1983, the English-Speaking Union has given more than 300,000 students of all backgrounds the opportunity to bring the timeless works of Shakespeare to life and to learn to express his words with understanding, feeling and clarity. The competition has been recognized by the Globe Center, the Children's Theatre Foundation of America and the American Academy of Achievement.



Jackson Dean from Palm Valley High School in Rancho Mirage, California was the winner of the 35th Annual English in Action National Shakespeare Competition and received a full scholarship to attend the Young Actor's Summer School at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London. A student of Susie Zachik and representative of the ESU Palm Springs Branch, Jackson performed as Iago from Shakespeare's *Othello* and recited Sonnet 55 in the final round of competition.

"Shakespeare is an art form. Shakespeare is fascinating and a truly remarkable advanced form of drama and theater. I'm looking forward to experiencing the exuberant life of the city once more. New York's energy, no matter how many times I visit the city, is beautifully contagious." wrote Jackson about Shakespeare and coming to New York City. His advice for future Shakespearians: *"You guys can win too if you believe in it. Don't doubt yourself."*



Eli Owens from Penfield High School in Penfield, New York placed second in the competition and received a scholarship to attend the American Shakespeare Center Theater Camp in Staunton, Virginia. A student of Regina Darling and representative of the ESU Rochester Branch, Eli performed as Parolles in Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well* and recited Sonnet 29 in the final round of competition.

"I'm excited to be surrounded by individuals who share a passion for something most individuals our age turn a blind eye to—individuals who look at Shakespeare as an art form, not an academic." wrote Eli about the experience of competing with fellow students.



Julia Talbot from Medford High School in Boston, Massachusetts placed third in the competition and received a cash prize of \$500. A student of Douglas Bowen-Flynn and representative of the ESU Boston Branch, Julia performed as Richard from Shakespeare's *Richard III* and recited Sonnet 129 in the final round of competition.

"Every time I read or reread Shakespeare, I have a miniature revelation: where that idiom came from, how another author was inspired, the origin of some quote I never even realized was a quote. His influence is everywhere in our culture, and so culture itself begins to make more sense reading him. He's just so universal: Hamlet will be relevant for as long as there are fathers and sons; Macbeth, as long as there are husbands and wives; Romeo and Juliet, as long as there are teenagers (and teenagers will always be teenagers)." wrote Julia about Shakespeare.

Joining the top winners in the final round of competition were **Gabriela Furtado Coutinho** from American Heritage School in Plantation, Florida; **Christina Liberus** from Urban Assembly School for the Performing Arts in Queens, New York; **Nicholas Moseley** from The Bishop's School in La Jolla, California; **Julian O'Byrne** from Marin School of the Arts in Novato, California; **Rohan Padmakumar** from Lusher Charter School in New Orleans, Louisiana; **Emily Trend** from Princeton Day School in Princeton, NJ; and **Samantha Vatalaro** from Shaker High School in Latham, NY.

The competition brings together renowned actors and members of the theater community to judge the students' performances. This year, actors **Kelley Curran** (a former National Shakespeare Competition participant) and **Geoffrey Owens** joined **Michael LoMonico**, Senior Consultant on National Education at the Folger Shakespeare Library; **Alexandra López**, Associate Director of Education at Lincoln Center Theater; and **Sid Ray**, Professor of English and Women's and Gender Studies at Pace University to judge

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the semifinal rounds. To judge the final round, actors **Dana Ivey** and **Graham Turner** joined **Sarah Enloe**, Director of Education at the American Shakespeare Center; **Christopher Hodgkins**, Professor of English at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro and member of the ESU Board of Directors; and **Louis Scheeder**, Director of the Classical Studio at the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University. Louis, the longest serving competition judge, has adjudicated with a long roster of former judges, including Sarah Jessica Parker, Sam Waterston, Phylicia Rashad, Blythe Danner, Jesse L. Martin, Cynthia Nixon, Richard Thomas, Courtney B. Vance, Dianne Wiest, and Helen Hayes.

Among the past competition participants who have gone on to national acclaim are actor and director Joe Sofranko, whose Hulu series *Complete Works* is based on the National Shakespeare Competition; actors Emily Bergl (*Shameless*, *Desperate Housewives*, *Southland*); Tyler Hilton (*Walk the Line*, *One Tree Hill*); Heather Lind (*Demolition*, *Boardwalk Empire*, *Turn: Washington's Spies*); Bronwyn Reed (*Law and Order: SVU*); as well as Broadway's Matt Harrington (*Twelfth Night*, *Matilda*) and Adam Wesley Brown (*Once the Musical*).

Citing its 35th season this year, the Honorable Bill De Blasio, Mayor of the City of New York, proclaimed Monday, May 23, 2018 as "William Shakespeare Day" in New York City. **Laura Hickey**, the Deputy British Consul General in New York, read the proclamation and Dr. Paul Beresford-Hill CBE KSt.J, Chairman of the English-Speaking Union, awarded the competitors certificates of achievement.

English in Action provided the semi-finalists who traveled to New York from around the country with two days of educational and cultural activities, including an exclusive acting workshop by the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University faculty and a tour of The Juilliard School. Perhaps best of all for these teenagers was the opportunity to spend time with other students from across the country who share a love of the English language and, particularly, Shakespeare.

For additional information regarding the English in Action National Shakespeare Competition, please visit www.shakespearecompetition.org.

Under the banner of English in Action, the English-Speaking Union (ESU) is a non-profit educational charity that employs the English language to foster global understanding and good will through educational opportunities and cultural exchange programs. Founded in 1920 and headquartered in New York City, the ESU is a national organization with more than 55 branches nationwide and affiliated with a network of more than 50 ESUs around the world.

English in Action educational programs focus on teacher enrichment, immigrant support, scholarships and youth speaking programs. Each year, our programs serve more than 60,000 teachers, students, volunteers and immigrants around the US.

English in Action programs include:

Andrew Romay New Immigrant Center (ARNIC) improves the lives of recent immigrants through education and cultural programs and integration into American society.

English in Action Conversations pair English language learners with trained volunteers to improve their English fluency through a one-on-one cultural exchange.

Luard Morse Scholarships sends students from Historically Black Colleges and Universities to study for a semester at a British university.

Middle School Debate builds research, critical thinking and public speaking skills through debate.

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National Shakespeare Competition develops high school students' analytical and communication skills through performing Shakespeare at the school, community and national levels.

Secondary School Exchange sends high school graduates to British boarding schools for a gap year abroad.

TLab provides teachers and lifelong learners educational enrichment programs at Oxford, the University of Edinburgh and Shakespeare's Globe.

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