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The Kennedy Center
announces the

Winners of the 2014 VSA Playwright Discovery Competition Recognizing Excellence in Young Playwrights

Eight Young Playwrights from Kentucky, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Texas, Virginia and Iran Invited to Participate in Weekend of Pre-Professional Activities at the Kennedy Center August 29-31, 2014

(WASHINGTON, D.C.)— VSA, a Jean Kennedy Smith Arts and Disability program of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, announces the winners of the 2014 VSA Playwright Discovery Competition. Eight high school playwrights from the Senior Division (grades 10-12) are invited to participate in a weekend of pre-professional activities at the Kennedy Center during the annual *Page-to-Stage* festival. The young playwrights will engage with seasoned professional playwrights, directors and actors to refine their scripts and further develop their playwriting skills. The winning plays include *On the Isle of the Lotus-Eaters* by Andrew Child, *In Your Shoes* by Nayereh Doosti, *Skin Deep* by Hannah Jarzombek, *Space-Girl* by Emma Morris, *HAPPY* by Billy Recce, *Group* by Caitlin Reynolds, *Layover* by Madalyn Rymer, and *Ikelos* by JC Statt. Selected excerpts from four scripts will be performed on the Millennium Stage on Sunday, August 31 at 6:00 p.m. The free performance will be streamed live on the Kennedy Center website and archived for future viewing.

A group of theater professionals including playwright and previous Playwright Discovery Competition winner Janet Allard; D.C. playwright Norman Allen; D.C. playwright Mary Hall Surface; New York City-based director and actor Gregg Mozgala; D.C.-based director Eleanor Holdridge; D.C.-based director Paul Douglas Michnewicz; and Chicago-based theater artist Michael Patrick Thornton will spend the weekend coaching, mentoring and working with the young playwrights.

Winners in the Primary Division (grades 6-7) are students from William Alexander Middle School 51 in Brooklyn, New York; White Pine School in White Pine, Tennessee; and

Northwest Junior High in Coralville, Iowa. Winners in the Junior Division (grades 8-9) are students from Jemicy School in Baltimore, Maryland; Green Residential Community House in Ringwood, New Jersey; and Emma Willard School in Niverville, New York. Each winner will receive a certificate of award and his or her school will receive \$500 to put towards arts programming.

The VSA Playwright Discovery Program is an annual competition that invites middle and high school students with and without disabilities to examine the disability experience and express their views through the art of script writing. The program was begun in 1984 by Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith, and has continued annually since. This year's recipients were chosen from more than 400 applications nationwide.

"We are delighted to recognize the work of these talented students," said Betty Siegel, Director of VSA and Accessibility at the Kennedy Center. "Their plays tell stories about the disability experiences from their own very personal unique perspectives, and we are proud to support the development of these young playwrights."

Andrew Child is a rising senior at Cardinal Spellman High School in Massachusetts, where he actively participates in theater and production. Some of his favorite past productions have included: *Arsenic and Old Lace*, *Sweeney Todd*, *And Then There Were None*, *Kiss Me Kate*, *Oklahoma!*, *Bye Bye Birdie*, and *West Side Story*. For the past few years he interned with the Bridgewater State University's *Arts for Youth* Summer Program, where he has experienced firsthand the benefits of theater education. A lover of medieval literature and the Arthurian legend, Andrew is currently a member of the International Arthurian Society; North American Branch.

Nayereh Doosti (نایره دوستی), originally from Shiraz, Iran, is a graduate of Interlochen Arts Academy. She is a student of the Iranian author, Aboutorab Khosravi, who has been her mentor since the age of 15, guiding her through the publication of her debut short story collection in Iran. She is the winner of three Kharazmi Medals (the highest honor in Iran for student creative writing), several Gold and Silver Keys from Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, and the Blank Theater Playwriting Contest. Her work has been published in several literary reviews both in Iran and in the U.S, such as *Interlochen Review*, *Dastan*, and *Bacheha Golagha*. She won the CTS Publication short story contest, which will publish a collection of her short stories in the fall.

Hannah Jarzombek is a rising senior at La Vernia High School in La Vernia, Texas and an avid reader and writer. She plans to attend the University of Texas in the fall of 2015 studying English and Creative Writing. During high school, she wrote two one-act plays, a TV episode, a novel, updated two classic works, and went to the state level in the National History Day History Fair. She is published in the poetry anthology, *Dreamcatcher*. She is highly active in her school's Speech and Debate program, *One Act Play*, and National Honor Society. She has competed at the state level in Speech and Debate twice and the area level in *One Act Play*. She plans to have a novel self-published on Kindle before she graduates high school.

Emma Morris is a freshman at Northern Kentucky University and a graduate of J.M. Atherton High School in Louisville, Kentucky. She originally turned to writing as a way to cope with her generalized anxiety disorder and depression when she was younger. She now looks to writing as a way to tell stories she wishes she had heard before. Her work *Space-Girl* was originally read at Actors' Theatre of Louisville in the 2014 New Voice Young Playwrights' Festival, directed by Talleri McRae. Her short-story adaptation received an honorable recognition from the Renau Foundation.

Billy Recce is composer, lyricist, and librettist of *Balloon Boy: The Musical*, which was the winner of the 2014 Thespian Musicalworks competition. *Balloon Boy: The Musical* has been performed throughout the country from Lincoln, Nebraska to New York City, and will be produced in Fort Collins, Colorado this fall. In addition to musicals, his other works extensively cover social justice, and have been recognized by the United Nations, as well as performed at various venues across New York.

Caitlin "Cat" Reynolds, is from Houston, Texas and is entering her senior year at Cypress Ranch High School. Enchanted by both music and dialogue, she began writing musicals at the age of 13. Her first musical, *Oh, Operator!*, was produced in January 2014 at Applause Theatrical School and Theatre Company. Since then she has had various shows and readings of her original scripts and music, with her debut album, *Favorite Words*, premiering in September. She hopes to continue to pursue writing as a career after she graduates.

Madalyn Rymer is currently a freshman at the University of Mary Washington. Raised as a military child, she has lived around the country, but most recently in Yorktown, Virginia. While living there, she had the opportunity to enroll in School of the Arts, a literary arts

magnet arts program. Through the program, she developed her playwriting skills and furthered her creative writing abilities.

JC Statt will be a freshman at Miami University (Ohio) this fall, majoring in Interactive Media Studies. He graduated from St. Xavier High School of Cincinnati. His play, titled *Ikelos*, was written during his senior year at St. Xavier High School. He was diagnosed with Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis at age 6, but this hasn't stopped him from wrestling and being involved in various theatrical endeavors. His favorite role was playing Professor Moriarty in *Sherlock Holmes and the Case of the Jersey Lily*, in part due to a climactic sword fight. In the future, he looks forward to juggling college, staying physically active, and producing *Ikelos* again.

The Kennedy Center Millennium Stage

Now in its 18th year, the Kennedy Center Millennium Stage offers a free performance every day of the year that is streamed live on the web. Unless otherwise noted, performances take place in the Kennedy Center Grand Foyer and no tickets are required.

About VSA

VSA was founded more than 35 years ago by Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith to provide opportunities for people with disabilities of all ages to learn through, participate in and enjoy the arts. VSA is a Jean Kennedy Smith Arts and Disability program of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. For more information, please visit the VSA [website](#).

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About Education at the Kennedy Center

The Kennedy Center retains its commitment as the nation's cultural center to educating and enlightening children in Washington and around the country. The Center's national education programs include: Ensuring the Arts for Any Given Child, which is currently working in 14 municipalities and their school districts around the country to develop a long-range strategic plan for arts education; ARTSEdge, a website that offers standards-based materials for use in and out of the classroom, Partners in Education, which forges relationships between an arts organization and its neighboring school systems to build effective arts education programs for teachers and teaching artists; Kennedy Center Alliance for Arts Education Network works with 33 state organizations on arts education policy issues; Explore the Arts, which provide insight into the cultural and historical context of the works presented on stage and sparks dialogue between audiences and the artists who have created the performances through participatory workshops, demonstrations, panels, master classes, and open rehearsals; and the Kennedy Center Stephen Sondheim Inspirational Teacher Awards, which acknowledge teachers of grades K-12 whose efforts have made a significant impact on their students.

Locally, the Kennedy Center's programs include Changing Education Through the Arts, a program that works with 15 schools in the area to affect long-term change in school

culture through professional learning in arts integration; Professional Development Opportunities for Teachers, which trains Washington-area educators to teach the arts or other subject areas through the arts; and Washington, D.C. Partnership Schools, where the Center provides resources and teaching artist residencies to 20 elementary, junior, and senior high schools in Washington, D.C. The Center also mounts more than 100 events and performances of theater, music, dance, and opera throughout the season for more than 100,000 local school-aged children.

In addition, the Center offers multiple career development programs for young artists both locally and nationally, including the National Symphony Orchestra's Youth Fellowship Program, Summer Music Institute, and High School Competition; Washington National Opera's Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program, Opera Institute, and Kids Create Opera Partnership; the biennial New Visions/ New Voices forum for development of new plays for young people; Exploring Ballet with Suzanne Farrell; Betty Carter's Jazz Ahead; VSA's Playwright Discovery Program, Young Soloists, and Visual Arts Programs; internships and fellowships; and the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival which impacts hundreds of thousands of college-aged theater students across the country and marks its 47th anniversary in 2015.

VSA is supported by the U.S. Department of Education.

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