



Oakland Youth Poet Laureate 2026

oaklandlibrary.org/youthpoets



JUDGING CRITERIA

Judges will use the following criteria to evaluate applicants to the Oakland Youth Poet Laureate program (OYPL).

Categories

First Round

Content

The poet's ability to examine their personal truths and make connections to larger community.

Craft

The poet's command of poetic craft and purposeful breaks with convention.

Voice

The poet's ability to write both honestly and authentically.

Final Round

Leadership (double weight)

The poet's potential for leading, inspiring, mentoring, and representing the city of Oakland and its youth, demonstrated by their involvement, and/or ideas for involvement, with their family, their peers, and/or their community.

Performance

How the poet breathes life into a poem.

Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Cannot Be Determined	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

Use the above scale to respond to the criteria sections on the following pages.

First round scores will determine the year's Oakland Youth Poet Laureate Finalists. Those Finalists will then go on to the final round.

Final round scores will be *added* to first round scores. The **total** of the first round **plus** the final round scores is the final determination of who will become the Oakland Youth Poet Laureate and Vice Laureate.



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JUDGING CRITERIA

First Round:

Three anonymous written poems will be judged on content, craft, and voice.

CONTENT

The poet's ability to examine their personal truths and make connections to larger community.

Content Qualities

- The poems engage in the process of sharing the poet's personal truths and resonate a sincere expression of their ambitions and beliefs.
- The poet critically investigates the status quo, societal norms, assumptions, and/or dominant beliefs.
- The poet is able to recognize themselves as a valuable member of their community and brings up issues or questions that concern that community, particularly other young people.
- The poet reflects an awareness of their ongoing responsibilities as a citizen of the world.
- The poet's work serves as a call to action for an issue(s) impacting Oakland and/or Oakland youth today.

CONTENT Score (out of 5)	
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CRAFT

The poet's command of poetic craft and purposeful breaks with convention.

Craft Qualities

- The poet shows a command of language, rhythm, symbolism, metaphor, form, and other poetic devices as creative tools.
- The poet intentionally plays with or manipulates traditional literary convention (e.g., spelling, grammar, verb tense) to highlight lines or ideas.
- The poet's voice is consistent throughout each individual poem.

CRAFT Score (out of 5)	
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JUDGING CRITERIA

VOICE

The poet's ability to write both honestly and authentically.

Voice Qualities

- The poet's work is powerful and elicits an emotional response.
- The poet conveys a strong viewpoint or a deep consideration of the subject matter.
- The poems could inspire young people across boundaries of race, class, gender, orientation, religion, geography, etc.
- The poet risks something; tackles personally difficult or controversial subjects with boldness and insight.
- The poet conveys their experience in an honest, original way.
- The poet gives proper credit to the source if another artist's work is sampled in a poem and/or uses quotation marks to indicate borrowed text.

VOICE Score (out of 5)	
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FIRST ROUND TOTAL (Content + Craft + Voice) (up to 15 points possible per judge)	
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JUDGING CRITERIA

Final Round:

An interview, a performance, and written materials will be used to judge the following criteria.

LEADERSHIP (double weight)

The poet's potential for leading, inspiring, mentoring, and representing the city of Oakland and its youth, demonstrated by their involvement, and/or ideas for involvement, with their family, their peers, and/or their community.

Leadership Qualities

- The poet has experience with inspiring, or has the potential to inspire, others to write, read, and listen to poetry.
- The poet uses their art to foster a culture that celebrates voice and empowers creative expression.
- The poet has the ability or the potential to speak for and about the city of Oakland and its youth in front of a variety of audiences.
- The poet has an interest in community service, education and improvement, and an ability to represent a collective and speak beyond their own self-interest to include the interests, struggles, and concerns of their community and the world.
- The poet seeks and responds to opportunity to take responsibilities with their family, their peers, and/or their community.
- The poet has participated in prior OYPL activities showing themselves to be proactive and interested as well as willing to take on responsibilities.

LEADERSHIP Score (out of 5)	
Double the Leadership score by multiplying by 2	x 2
LEADERSHIP TOTAL (out of 10)	

PERFORMANCE

How the poet breathes life into a poem.

Performance Qualities

- The performance of the poem is powerful and elicits an emotional response.
- The poet's presence is made strong by their use of eye contact, confidence, and ability to engage with the audience.
- The poet's voice is clear and easy to understand. The poet is able to adequately project their voice.
- The poet uses their body to fortify the poem.
- The poet's language is fluid and fluent.

PERFORMANCE Score (out of 5)	
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JUDGING CRITERIA

FINAL ROUND TOTAL (Performance + Leadership) (up to 15 points possible per judge)	
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FIRST ROUND TOTAL (Content + Craft + Voice) (up to 15 points possible per judge)	
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DETERMINING TOTAL (First Round Total + Final Round Total) (up to 30 points possible per judge)	
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