



Minnesota Humanities Center Announces Sienna Lee as the Inaugural Minnesota Youth Poet Laureate

For Immediate Release

April 27, 2026—ST. PAUL, MN—The Minnesota Humanities Center (MHC), along with its national partner, Urban Word, announces **Sienna Lee of Moorhead, Minnesota (age 17)** as the inaugural Minnesota Youth Poet Laureate (MYPL).

Lee was selected through a highly competitive statewide process that drew talented young poets from across Minnesota, representing a wide geographic and experiential cross-section of the state. As Minnesota's first Youth Poet Laureate, she will serve a one-year term as a public ambassador for poetry—appearing at events statewide, engaging communities, and participating in national youth poetry convenings. She will also receive mentorship from Minnesota-based poets and literary organizations committed to artistic excellence, leadership, and civic engagement.

Lee's portfolio demonstrated exceptional poetic craft, technical control, and emotional depth. Her work explores themes of identity, immigration, and social justice with clarity and resonance, and reflects a level of consistency and maturity beyond her peers. Lee's application also highlighted significant civic engagement and leadership, positioning her to serve effectively in this ambassadorial role.

"We extend our congratulations to Sienna Lee as Minnesota's first Youth Poet Laureate," said Kevin Lindsey, CEO of the Minnesota Humanities Center. "Sienna's work reflects artistic excellence and a deep commitment to community, and we are proud to support her in the national poetry competition."

In addition to Lee, the Committee recognized two outstanding finalists—Sofia Rivera (St. Paul, age 16) and Knox Frederickson (Eagan, age 17)—as runners-up in the Minnesota Youth Poet Laureateship.

The selection was made by an eleven-member Leadership Committee representing a broad cross-section of Minnesota's poetry, education, and literary communities. The Committee includes practicing poets, educators, publishers, youth literary leaders, and state and city Poets Laureate, with representation spanning the Twin Cities and Greater Minnesota. Members bring expertise in evaluating poetic craft, mentoring emerging writers, and assessing readiness for public-facing leadership roles.

The Committee conducted a multi-step review process, including independent scoring and collaborative discussion, to identify a top tier of finalists. Lee emerged as the clear top candidate with strong consensus across reviewers.

The Minnesota Youth Poet Laureate program was established through the 2025 legislative cycle

to create a statewide platform for young poets. The program also connects Minnesota to the national Youth Poet Laureate network administered by Urban Word NYC, providing pathways for national recognition and engagement.

About the Minnesota Humanities Center (MHC)

MHC, an affiliate to the National Endowment for the Humanities, was founded as an independent non-profit organization in 1971. MHC strengthens our society by promoting humanities and increasing shared understanding of our collective pasts. MHC creates a wide variety of humanities programming in collaboration with individuals, creators, scholars, and organizations to build a more curious, inclusive, and connected society. MHC has a long history as a grantmaking organization and operates a full-service event center in a historic building in St. Paul. More information is available at mnhum.org.

About the NYPL Program and Urban Word

Founded in 2008, the [National Youth Poet Laureate](#) Program is an initiative of Urban Word—the largest and most comprehensive youth literary arts organization in the country—in collaboration with local arts and literary organizations, Arts Councils and library systems; and is supported by the leading organizations in our field, including the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Academy of American Poets, the Poetry Coalition, the Library of Congress, the National Parks Service, and the Kennedy Center.

About Clean Water Land & Legacy Amendment

The Minnesota Legislature passed the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment (Legacy Amendment) in 2008 to ensure clean water, preserve opportunities for Minnesotans to enjoy nature, parks, and trails, and to appreciate arts and culture that exists within the State. The Legacy Amendment increases the state sales tax by three-eighths of one percent to create the Legacy Fund – 19.75% of the Legacy Fund is dedicated to the arts and cultural heritage fund.



Media Contact: Ali Syverson, Director of Strategic Communications, email ali@mnhum.org & 651-772-4295, Program Contact: Casey DeMarais, email casey@mnhum.org & 651-772-4278