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Young Voices Rise Youth Poetry Festival showcases original poetry by Valley high school students

Mesa Arts Center's Project Lit program culminates in free poetry event

Feb. 19, 2020 (Mesa, AZ) – Following preliminary and semi-final competitions across the Valley, 16 high school students will compete and share original poetry at the 8th annual Young Voice Rise Youth Poetry Festival on Saturday, March 21, 6-9:30 p.m. in Mesa Arts Center's Piper Theater. The evening is a culminating event of Mesa Arts Center's Project Lit program, an out-of-school-time program that uses poetry, spoken word and hip hop to promote literacy and activate social and emotional learning with young and emerging adults. The event is free and open to the public.

"The biggest fear in most people is public speaking," says Tomas Stanton, spoken word artist and Mesa Arts Center's Engagement Manager. "The main reason for this is because speaking in front of people opens you up to the judgement of those people. Through Project Lit our goal is to create a brave space for young people to develop the skill of public speaking and self-confidence. If you can break it down on a microphone in front of an audience, then you can break it down anywhere. What a skill to have as a young person about to embark on adulthood!"

Project Lit engages youth in finding their voice while also mastering the writing process. The program also allows for exploration and discovery through a framework of collaboration between teaching artists, teachers and students, building a brave space for expression.

23 schools and 230 students participated in the Project Lit program in 2019-20, and the program is generously supported by the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust, the Otto and Edna Neely Foundation, Wells Fargo, Thunderbird Charities, Cardinals Charities, Mesa Hohokams, The Steele Foundation, and Bill Passey & Maria Silva. Anyone wishing to bring Project Lit to their schools or to get more information about the program is encouraged to visit mesaartscenter.com/projectlit.

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About Mesa Arts Center

The Mesa Arts Center, owned and operated by the City of Mesa, is a unique, architecturally stunning facility located in the heart of downtown Mesa. Arizona's largest arts center is home to four theaters, five art galleries, and 14 art studios. Guests, patrons, and students come to Mesa Arts Center to enjoy the finest live entertainment and performances, world-class visual art exhibitions, and outstanding arts education classes. The Mesa Arts Center mission is to inspire

people through engaging arts experiences that are diverse, accessible, and relevant. For more information, visit [mesaartscenter.com](https://www.mesaartscenter.com).