

**The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts  
announces the**

**Winners of the 2018  
VSA Playwright Discovery Competition  
Recognizing Excellence in Young Playwrights**

**Three Young Playwrights from Kentucky, Michigan, and Texas  
Invited to Participate in Weekend of Pre-Professional Activities at the  
Kennedy Center, April 13–15, 2018**

(WASHINGTON)—Three young playwrights from Kentucky, Michigan, and Texas have been selected as the winners of the 2018 VSA Playwright Discovery Competition, a Jean Kennedy Smith Arts and Disability program of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. The competition challenges middle to high-schooled aged writers to explore the disability experience through crafting short plays— from their own experiences and observations, creating fictional characters and settings, or choosing to write metaphorically or abstractly about the disability experience. The three winning playwrights of the competition’s Senior Division (grades 10–12) will travel to Washington, D.C. to participate in a weekend of pre-professional activities at the Kennedy Center during the annual Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival, April 13–15.

The award recipients and winning plays are:

<b>PLAYWRIGHT(S)</b>	<b>PLAY</b>	<b>HOMETOWN</b>
Cathleen Freedman	<i>One’s Self Perception</i>	Houston, Texas
Taryn Seif	<i>I’ll Do Anything</i>	Louisville, Kentucky
Elizabeth Schriener	<i>Confessing a Chronic Illness</i>	Olivet, Michigan

The young playwrights will engage with seasoned professional playwrights, directors, and actors to refine their scripts and further develop their playwriting skills. Excerpts from selected scripts will be presented as part of the weekend's activities.

A group of theater professionals will spend the weekend coaching, mentoring, and working with the young playwrights. Mentors include Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company Member and multiple Helen Hayes Award nominee Jon Hudson Odom; Curt L. Tofteland, founder of Shakespeare Behind Bars; Kennedy Center Kenan Fellow in Directing Robyn Rikoon; disability advocate and actress Christine Bruno from Alliance for Inclusion in the Arts; and Gary Garrison, the Director of the Dramatists Guild Institute. A dynamic acting company including Kashayna Johnson, Chelsea Dee, Justin Weeks, Joey Ibanez, Barb Pinolini, Christine Bruno, CarrieAnn Quinn, and Clayton Pelham, Jr. will also work with the playwrights on their plays.

“The stories on the page and the talent of these five high school students with disabilities grabbed us at the first reading.” said Betty Siegel, Director of VSA and Accessibility at the Kennedy Center. “Their writing, their singular voices, and their capacity to engage us in their stories through the art of playwriting comes from many places ranging from personal courage to self-expression and ingenuity! We are honored to support their continued creative development.”

### **2018 VSA Playwright Discovery Competition Winners**

**Cathleen Freedman** (*One's Self Perception*) is a senior within the creative writing department at the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts in Houston, Texas. Her writing has been performed by her peers in Houston, herself, and actors in New York City. Freedman was born with radial dysplasia in her dominant right hand, which later resulted in arthritis during her freshman year. She has since had two surgeries, multiple casts and splints, and become left-handed. As she likes to say, she went through high school “single-handedly.” She is thrilled and honored to be a 2018 VSA Discovery Playwright!

**Taryn Seif** (*I'll Do Anything*) is a junior at the Kentucky School for the Blind. Seif, who has low vision, is motivated to write a good story. Besides continuing to write plays

and stories, in the future, she would like to learn how to teach assistive technology to those who need it.

**Elizabeth Schriener** (*Confessing a Chronic Illness*) is a high school senior in Olivet, Michigan. Three years ago, she was diagnosed with Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (Lupus/SLE) and Lupus Nephritis. She has been involved in various local drama productions, including her recent performance of “JoJo” in her high school’s production of *Seussical*. She has also received numerous Michigan Interscholastic Forensic Association (MIFA) Excellence and Superior Honor Awards for acting, dramaturgy, program design, and lobby display design at the district, regional, and state level. She is extremely thankful for this amazing opportunity.

### **About VSA**

The Kennedy Center has been at the forefront of making the performing arts accessible to persons with disabilities. Serving the international disability and arts community, the Office of VSA and Accessibility, a Jean Kennedy Smith Arts and Disability program, provides opportunities for people with disabilities of all ages across the globe to learn through, participate in, and enjoy the arts. The Office focuses its efforts on arts and special education initiatives; accessibility services for patrons and visitors with disabilities; professional development for educators and cultural administrators; and career opportunities in the arts for people with disabilities. For more information, please visit <http://education.kennedy-center.org/education/#Access>.

### **About Education at the Kennedy Center**

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts is the national champion for arts learning and creativity. Committed to increasing opportunities for all people to participate in, learn about, and understand the arts, the Center offers programs and events that strive to reflect the nation and its communities, and that are accessible and inclusive for all. From the Center’s stages to classrooms and communities across the country, to online resources accessible nearly anywhere, the Center serves the burgeoning artist, the curious explorer, the student (of any age), the teacher and teaching artist—any person interested in arts learning and utilizing the arts for positive change.

As an essential component of the living memorial to President Kennedy, the Center’s Education programs utilize the arts to embrace the ideals of service, justice, freedom, courage, and gratitude, and cultivate the Citizen Artists in all the people we serve. For more information, please visit [kennedy-center.org/education/](http://kennedy-center.org/education/).

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The content of this program may have been developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education but does not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education. You should not assume endorsement by the federal government.

For more information, please visit the VSA [website](#).

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