



Press Release

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

August 8, 2016

UPDATED: September 28, 2016

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

**Winners of the 2016 VSA Playwright Discovery  
Competition  
Recognizing Excellence in Young Playwrights**

**Nine Young Playwrights from Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, Rhode  
Island, and Texas Invited to Participate in Weekend of Pre-Professional  
Activities at the  
Kennedy Center September 3-5, 2016**

(WASHINGTON)—VSA, an Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith Arts and Disability program of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, announces the winners of the 2016 VSA Playwright Discovery Competition. Nine 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* New Play Festival. 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 performed during the weekend of September 3-5, 2016.

The VSA Playwright Discovery Competition 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 87 applications from across the U.S.

The recipients and winning plays include:

<b>PLAY</b>	<b>PLAYWRIGHT(S)</b>	<b>HOMETOWN</b>
<i>Fish Waiting for Trees</i>	Lukia Artemakis	Chicago, IL
<i>Madam C.J. Walker's Wonderful Hair Grower</i>	Ella Brett-Turner	Providence, RI
<i>Two Scoops of Ice Cream</i>	Sophia DuRose and Kaitlyn O'Malley	Kissimmee, FL and Orlando, FL
<i>Missing Pieces</i>	Emma Filosa	Marlborough, CT
<i>Learn Your ABC's</i>	Elijah Gaines and Jaleel Lindsay	Ringwood, NJ
<i>Supernova</i>	Andrew Projansky	Grove, IL
<i>Time Stops</i>	Brad Weatherford	Dallas, TX

A group of theater professionals including New York City-based directors Lori Wolter Hudson and Gregg Wiggins, Michael Patrick Thornton of Chicago's Gift Theatre, Howard University's Kevin Thorne II, Chicago-based devised theatre artist Lindsey Barlag Thornton, and Gregg Mozgala, actor, Kennedy Center Citizen Artist Fellow and artistic director of New York's Apothetae, a theater company devoted to new plays that illuminate the disability experience, will spend the weekend coaching, mentoring and working with the young playwrights.

Ife Martin, the winner in the Primary Division (grades 6-7) is a student from Ann Abor STEAM at Northside in Eastpoint, Michigan. Students Alessandra Sommers and Colin McKenna are winners in the Junior Division (grades 8-9). Sommers attends Union County Academy for Performing Arts in Scotch Plains, New Jersey and McKenna is a student from The Craig School in Mountain Lakes, New Jersey. Each winner will receive a certificate of award and his or her school will receive \$500 to put towards arts programming.

"We are delighted to welcome these nine gifted and diverse young playwrights to the Kennedy Center," said Betty Siegel, Director of VSA and Accessibility at the Kennedy Center. "Through their personal experiences and observations, the depth of the disability experience shines in their works. We are proud to support the development of these young artists in helping shape the conversation and give voice to the importance of telling these stories."

## **About VSA**

Serving the international disability and arts community, VSA provides opportunities for people with disabilities, of all ages, across the globe to learn through, participate in and enjoy the arts. Founded 41 years ago by Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith, the VSA international network supports and offers a wide array of accessible cultural, arts and education programs and experiences. Please visit VSA at: [kennedy-center.org/education/vsa/](http://kennedy-center.org/education/vsa/).

## **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, its communities, and that are accessible and inclusive for all. From performances and exhibits on the Center's stages and in the community, to classroom and community partnerships, to online resources accessible nearly anywhere, the Center serves the burgeoning artist, the exploring student of any age, the teacher and teaching artist, and even the local and national infrastructure—any person interested in arts learning and utilizing the arts for positive change.

The breadth of the Center's national education programs include: *Ensuring the Arts for Any Given Child*, which works with 23 municipalities and their school districts around the country to develop a long-range strategic plan for arts education; ARTSEdge, an online resource offering standards-based materials for use in and out of the classroom; Partners in Education forges relationships between an arts organization and its neighboring school systems to build effective arts education programs for teachers and teaching artists; Explore the Arts provides 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; the Kennedy Center/Stephen Sondheim Inspirational Teacher Awards acknowledges teachers of grades K-12 whose efforts have made a significant impact on their students; Kennedy Center Theater for Young Audiences on Tour brings original Kennedy Center productions for students and families into communities and performing arts centers around the country; and in 2016, the Center and the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities announced a strategic partnership to bring the Turnaround Arts initiative to the Center, which empowers high-need, low-performing schools with innovative arts programming and resources to help address broader school challenges and close the achievement gap.

The Center's locally based programs serve educators and students with Changing Education Through the Arts, a program that works with seven schools in the area to affect long-term change in school culture through professional learning in arts integration; professional development opportunities for teachers trains 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 22 K-12 schools. Additionally, 100 plus events and performances throughout the season are offered for more than 100,000 local school-aged children.

As the national performing arts center and a convener of arts and education leaders, its programming also draws from the resources of National Symphony Orchestra, The Suzanne Farrell Ballet, VSA (the international arts and disability organization), Washington National Opera, and the Performances for Young Audiences series.

Believing in the fundamental need to nurture young artists' growth, the Center offers multiple skill and development programs for students and professionals 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; arts administration internships; and the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival which impacts hundreds of thousands of college-aged theater students across the country and marks its 49th anniversary in 2017.

As an essential component of the living memorial to President Kennedy, the Center's Education Division utilizes the arts to embrace the ideals of service, justice, freedom, courage, and gratitude, and to activate and support the Citizen Artists in all our audiences. For more information, please visit [kennedy-center.org/education/](http://kennedy-center.org/education/).

### **Funding Credits**

The VSA Playwright Discovery Program is made possible by Mike and Julie Connors and the U.S. Department of Education.

Kennedy Center education and related artistic programming is made possible through the generosity of the National Committee for the Performing Arts and the President's Advisory Committee on the Arts.

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.

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

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