

Poet Laureate contest gets students snapping

By JESSICA PIERCE

The Black Box Theatre is filled with students, parents and teachers all anxiously shifting in their seats, awaiting the start of the Reynolds High School Poet Laureate competition.

English teacher Amy Fitzgerald gives a short welcome to the poets and guests to open the floor for the performance to begin. One by one, each poet walks to the front of the room to read his or her entry. Some of the poets perform with energy and excitement, while others are more reserved.

Out of the 10 finalists, junior Jeremy Sexton and sophomore Hunter McIntosh were chosen as the winners of the Reynolds event. Both will be given the chance to perform against other students at a district-wide competition on April 19, where the first-, second- and third-place winners will receive monetary awards.

Sexton and McIntosh will also have their poems published in a program handed out on the night of the performance.

"It was very hard to decide the winners," said Fitzgerald, who explained that the deciding factor was the two requirements each poet had to meet: strong written poem and strong presentation.

The judges wanted one poet who excelled in the written portion and one poet who excelled in the performance part of the competition. Some of the aspects each student was graded on were how well they conveyed their emotions in their performance, the spelling and grammar in the written poems, and how accurate their presentation was.

"It's hard to read the poem the way you felt it when you wrote

it," Sexton said when asked how difficult it was performing in front of an audience.

Fitzgerald said the small performance in the Black Box was meant to give Reynolds students a better chance at the larger competition next month.

Sexton and McIntosh were chosen after a process that saw students submit entries throughout February. A panel of English teachers then selected the 10 finalists.

As with most poems and works of art, there is a story behind everything. Sexton's poem, "After the Party," was written after a party he went to in eighth grade.

"It seemed so superficial and unfulfilling," he said.

McIntosh's poem – "Ropeburn" – was written based off his childhood experience of being abused. Both poems come from very different places, but are filled with the emotion that people want to hear when they come to a poetry reading: "People can relate even if they aren't willing to share," McIntosh said. "Nobody is alone."

For both winners, poetry has helped them in many ways.

McIntosh said poetry helped him "find himself" following the abuse he suffered.

Sexton, meanwhile, called

the process of writing poetry a great release.

"If you've got stuff on your mind, I recommend poetry," Sexton said. "If you've got any hard emotions, it's a good way to express them."



Photos by Jessica Pierce

See the winning entries of sophomore Hunter McIntosh (left) and junior Jeremy Sexton on Page 2. McIntosh's poem is titled 'Ropeburn' and Sexton wrote an entry called 'After the Party.'