



Mission Statement

The English-Speaking Union of the United States is committed to promoting scholarship and the advancement of knowledge through the effective use of English in an expanding global community. The ESU carries out its work through a network of 72 Branches and affiliates in the United Kingdom and 50 other countries, sponsoring a variety of language and international education programs.



A Brief History of the National Shakespeare Competition

The English-Speaking Union **National Shakespeare Competition** is a school-based program designed to help high school students develop their speaking and critical thinking skills and their appreciation of literature as they explore the beauty of the language and the timeless themes in Shakespeare works. In the competition, students read, interpret, and perform monologues and sonnets in three qualifying stages—at the school, community, and national levels.

Since its beginnings with 500 students in NYC, the program has given more than 250,000 young people of all backgrounds the opportunity to discover Shakespeare's writings and to communicate their understanding of his language and message. Currently, the Competition involves 60 English-Speaking Union Branch communities nationwide.

Every April, the winners of the local Branch Competitions come to New York City to take part in the **ESU National Shakespeare Competition** held at Lincoln Center. In the semi-finals, all contestants perform a monologue and a sonnet on stage. In the last phase of the Competition, those students selected as finalists present a cold reading in addition to their monologues and sonnets.

The winner of the **ESU National Shakespeare Competition** receives a scholarship for summer study in the United Kingdom. The runner-up receives \$1,000 from the English-Speaking Union, and the third place winner is awarded \$500 by The Shakespeare Society.

The **ESU National Shakespeare Competition** has been recognized by the Globe Center (USA), the Children's Theatre Foundation of America, and the American Academy of Achievement. Judges for the Competition have included Andre Braugher, Kate Burton, Maurice Charney, Blythe Danner, Barry Edelstein, Lisa Gay Hamilton, Helen Hayes, Edward Herrmann, Dana Ivey, Peter Francis James, Kristin Linklater, Peter MacNicol, Jesse L. Martin, Cynthia Nixon, Tina Packer, Sarah Jessica Parker, Nancy Piccione, Phylicia Rashad, Christopher Reeve, Louis Scheeder, Carole Shelley, Richard Thomas, Courtney B. Vance, Sam Waterston, Dianne Wiest, Gene Wilder, and Irene Worth.