



The English-Speaking Union National Shakespeare Competition


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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA TEEN COMPETES IN 34th ANNUAL ENGLISH-SPEAKING UNION NATIONAL SHAKESPEARE COMPETITION IN NEW YORK CITY

New York City: With a performance of a sonnet and monologue from Shakespeare, **Ryan Smith** from Roanoke, VA, a student of Steve Rittenhouse at Patrick Henry High School in Roanoke, placed as a semi-finalist in the 34th annual English-Speaking Union National Shakespeare Competition in New York City. The Competition took place on May 1, 2017 on the stage of the Mitzi Newhouse Theater at Lincoln Center with 54 semi-finalists from as many ESU Branch competitions nationwide. Ryan previously won the ESU Southwest Virginia Branch competition.

More than 20,000 high school students nationwide participated in the 2017 English-Speaking Union National Shakespeare Competition at the local, regional, and national levels. Among the winners and finalists of the Competition who have gone on to national acclaim are actor and director Joe Sofranko, whose Hulu series *Complete Works* is, in fact, based on the National Shakespeare Competition; actors Emily Bergl (*Shameless*, *Desperate Housewives*, *Southland*); Tyler Hilton (*Walk the Line*, *One Tree Hill*); Heather Lind (*Demolition*, *Boardwalk Empire*, *Turn: Washington's Spies*); Bronwyn Reed (*Law and Order: SVU*); as well as Broadway's Matt Harrington (*Twelfth Night*, *Matilda*) and Adam Wesley Brown (*Once the Musical*).

The winner of the 34th English-Speaking Union National Shakespeare Competition, **Ogechi Egonu**, representing the San Francisco Branch, received a full scholarship to attend the American Shakespeare Center Theatre Camp in Staunton, VA, this summer. Second place winner, **Brandon Burk**, from the Kentucky Branch, won a cash prize of \$1,000 from The English-Speaking Union, while the third place winner, **Trevon Wainwright**, representing the Kansas City Branch of the ESU, received an award of \$500 provided by The Shakespeare Society.

This year, actors Kate Burton and Dana Ivey served as judges, joining a roster of former judges that includes such luminaries as Sarah Jessica Parker, Sam Waterston, Phylicia Rashad, Blythe Danner, Jesse L. Martin, Cynthia Nixon, Richard Thomas, Courtney B. Vance, Dianne Wiest, and Helen Hayes.

The English-Speaking Union National Shakespeare Competition is a school-based program designed to help students develop their speaking and critical thinking skills and their appreciation of literature as they explore the beauty of

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Ryan Smith

Competes in ESU National Shakespeare Competition

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the language and timeless themes in Shakespeare's works. In three progressive competition levels, students memorize, interpret, and perform monologues and sonnets in their own schools, at ESU Branch-sponsored community competitions and at the English-Speaking Union National Shakespeare Competition. Citing its 34th season this year, the Honorable Bill De Blasio, Mayor of the City of New York, proclaimed May 1, 2017 as William Shakespeare Day in New York City. Laura Hickey the British Deputy Consul-General in New York, read the proclamation, and Dr. Paul Beresford-Hill CBE KSt.J, Chairman of the English-Speaking Union, awarded certificates to the competitors.

The ESU provided the semi-finalists with two days of educational and cultural activities in New York City, including an exclusive acting workshop by the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University faculty. Perhaps best of all for these teenagers was the opportunity to spend time with other students from across the country who share a love of the English language and, particularly, Shakespeare.

Founded in 1920, the English-Speaking Union is a nonprofit, nonpolitical organization that promotes English as a shared language to foster global understanding and good will by providing educational and cultural opportunities for students and educators.



Ryan Smith, semi-finalist, competing at Lincoln Center in New York City during the 2017 English-Speaking Union National Shakespeare Competition.



The 54 semi-finalists at the 2017 English-Speaking Union National Shakespeare Competition in New York City.

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