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**Emily Igwike to serve as Milwaukee's First Youth Poet Laureate**

Emily Igwike, a junior at University School of Milwaukee, was selected in April as the winner of Milwaukee's first-ever Youth Poet Laureate competition. She will spend the next year amplifying the power of poetry throughout the city.

Igwike's inaugural public appearance in the role will be a poetry reading on Tuesday, June 13, at Poetry in the Park (Juneau Park, 900 N. Prospect Ave.). The event, which is free and open to the public, begins at 6:30 pm and will also feature current Wisconsin Poet Laureate Nicholas Gulig, current Madison Poet Laureate Angela Trudell Vasquez, and Michaela Lacy, former Youth Poet Laureate from Prince George's County, Maryland (2018).

The Milwaukee Youth Poet Laureate (MYPL) program is affiliated with the National Youth Poet Laureate program in collaboration with Urban Word NYC. The program identifies, celebrates, and honors teen poets who exhibit a commitment to not just artistic excellence but also civic engagement, youth leadership, and social justice. Locally, the program is administered by Woodland Pattern Book Center in partnership with the Milwaukee Public Library, the UWM Writing Project, and the UWM Graduate Program in Creative Writing.

Each year, the MYPL will have the opportunity to design poetry-based projects that will engage the community and inspire social change. Igwike plans to lead generative writing workshops and host readings and performances for Milwaukeeans of all ages, and also hopes to work on programs that focus on food insecurity in Wisconsin and literacy in the Milwaukee community.

Igwike, who describes herself as "a proud Nigerian-American," is a lifelong lover of poetry who uses writing as an opportunity to share her heritage and deepen her own connection to it. She also believes that poetry allows people to slow down and find joy and beauty in small and even difficult moments. "Poetry is a powerful tool for recording life's challenges and a way to grow in empathy with others," she said.

Though Igwike is just starting out in her poet laureate role here in Milwaukee, she is no stranger to sharing her poetry widely. In Fall 2022, she was named one of five National Student

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Poets through the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. As the representative for the Midwest region for 2022–23, Igwike was invited to read at the White House, where she was honored by First Lady Jill Biden, and this past April she was the featured student reader at the Academy of American Poets' signature event, *Poetry & the Creative Mind*, where she joined notable figures including U.S. Poet Laureate Ada Limón, Ethan Hawke, and Malala Yousafzai.

Despite the significant recognition she has already received as poet, Emily describes the sudden honor of being named Milwaukee Youth Poet Laureate as “an out of body experience,” one that left her “speechless.” She says, “The other contestants were extremely talented. . . . I was happy to share my work, happy to be present.” One person who was not surprised was her father, Emmanuel Igwike, who after the competition referred to his daughter as “the hardest working person I know.”

To follow Igwike's activities during her year as MYPL, and to learn more about the MYPL program and the application process, visit [www.woodlandpattern.org/youthpoetlaureate](http://www.woodlandpattern.org/youthpoetlaureate).

Woodland Pattern is grateful to all who have sponsored this program. Sponsors include the Academy of American Poets, Amazon Literary Partnership, the Friends of the Milwaukee Public Library, Gardner Foundation, the Brandon Gelzer Memorial Fund at the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, the UWM Program in Creative Writing, and many private donors.

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**About Woodland Pattern Book Center:** Woodland Pattern is a nonprofit book center, gallery, and performance space supporting the work of poets and other artists from Milwaukee and around the country. Each year, the organization hosts 400+ programs and events—including workshops, poetry performances, concerts, exhibitions, film screenings, and programs for children and youth. Since 1980, the organization has presented a long list of seminal figures in contemporary literature, music, film, and art, while also serving as a community space.

In addition to its programmatic activities, Woodland Pattern houses over 25,000 small-press titles otherwise unavailable in the Milwaukee area and is home to the largest collection of haiku in North America, the largest Native American section in Wisconsin, and one of the largest collections of contemporary poetry in the world. The center likewise holds a sizeable collection of works by writers from Wisconsin and the Upper Midwest, including hundreds of self-published books.

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