



NEWS FROM TCA: MARCH 2026

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Introducing-- and congratulating-- the 2026 class of Young Masters

15 Texas Students Selected for 2026 Young Masters Grants

The Texas Commission on the Arts (TCA) and the Texas Cultural Trust (TXCT) are proud to announce the 2026 class of Young Masters. Young Masters is a grant program that provides exemplary students in grades 8-11 with financial support to pursue advanced study in the areas of visual arts, literary arts, music, theater, dance, musical theater, folk & traditional arts, and media arts. This year's promising young students come from 12 cities across Texas and together display a variety of artistic talents.

Through this grant program, talented young artists from across the state receive the title of "Young Master" and are awarded grants of \$5,000 per year to further their studies in their chosen arts disciplines. This gifted group of 15 students represents the thirteenth class of Young Masters, which is generously supported by the Butler Texas Young Masters Endowment. Students are eligible to receive the grant for two years. Since the program's inception in 2002, the Trust and TCA have awarded 431 grants to 199 Young Masters, investing more than \$1.3 million in their artistic development.

To be considered for the Young Masters grant, students must be legal U.S. residents living in Texas and participating in a school-based program, a summer institute, or a specialized course of study or receiving private lessons from a qualified professional instructor. They must also maintain passing grades in all academic areas.

TCA and TXCT congratulate these young artists for their

accomplishments and look forward to celebrating them at a star-studded awards ceremony on April 13 at Austin's ZACH Theater.

Sydney Bridgewater, 9th Grade, Frisco, Dance ●
Emmalynne Brown, 10th Grade, Richmond, Dance/Ballet ● **Isabella Cervera**, 11th Grade, San Antonio, Musical Theater ● **Josephine Chow**, 11th Grade, Austin, Music/Piano ● **Jenny Chu**, 11th Grade, Dallas, Literary Arts/Poetry ● **Matthew Conway**, 9th Grade, Prosper, Dance ● **Alessandro Dieguez**, 10th Grade, Amarillo, Musical Theater ● **Joseph Kirillov**, 10th Grade, Prosper, Dance ● **Caroline McGowan**, 10th Grade, Dallas, Dance ● **Annie Newton**, 9th Grade, Kingwood, Music/Percussion ● **Hana Reel**, 10th Grade, The Woodlands, Music/Vocal ● **Emilia Tovar-Catete**, 11th Grade, Mission, Film/Media Arts ● **Elim Wong**, 9th Grade, Plano, Music/Violin ● **Ayden Yang**, 8th Grade, Dallas, Music/Voice ● **Jonathan Zhang**, 11th Grade, Houston, Music/Saxophone



Texas Young Masters

Almaz Clawson Named 2026 Texas Poetry Out Loud Winner



The [Poetry Out Loud](#) recitation contest is a national project of the National Endowment for the Arts. This exciting program helps students master public speaking skills, build self-confidence, and learn about their literary heritage. High school students memorize poems and perform them in competition. The students are evaluated on qualities such as articulation, evidence of

understanding, accuracy and overall performance. This year's anthology of poems celebrates the United States' 250th anniversary. In the 2026 Texas state competition, 21 high school students from across Texas competed for a chance to advance to the state finals. The virtual semi-finals, held in late January, were judged by poets/performers Florinda Bryant, Charlie Clark, Mag Gabbert, and 2022 Texas Poet Laureate Lupe Mendez.

The 2026 Texas Poetry Out Loud finals were held in person at the Texas Spirit Theater and graciously hosted by the Bullock Texas State History Museum on Saturday, February 28. The finals brought together the top ten competitors from across the state to determine the state champion and runner-up. The event was hosted by internationally renowned Texas poet Naomi Shihab Nye. The judges for the competition, C. Prudence Arceneaux, Tarfia Faizullah, Rodney Gomez, and 2026 Texas Poet Laureate Kevin Prufer, are Texas poets and performers.

After two rounds, the field was narrowed to five finalists: Carly Boothe, a junior at Vanguard College Preparatory School in China Spring; Joslynn Ratcliffe, a ninth grader from the Northside School of Innovation, Technology, and Entrepreneurship in San Antonio; Almaz Clawson, a junior at the Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts in Dallas; Benjamin Standefer, a senior at St. Mark's School of Texas in Dallas; and Emma Rucker, a home-schooled 11th grader from Alvin.

Ultimately, Ms. Clawson won the 2026 Poetry Out Loud state final. As state champion, she will receive \$200 and will represent Texas at the national level. Almaz will compete in Washington, DC, April 27-29, 2026, for a pool of \$50,000 in scholarships for students and cash awards for schools. Additionally, her school will receive \$500 for the purchase of poetry books and materials. The Texas runner-up was Joslynn Ratcliffe. She will receive \$100, while her school will receive \$200 for the purchase of poetry books and materials. We congratulate all our 2026 participants, their teachers, and their families.

Photo: Lens of Athena Photography

Upcoming TCA Application Deadline

TCA has an upcoming application deadline. As always, the TCA staff is happy to discuss your goals and eligibility to determine which programs are right for you. You may also request that a TCA staff member review your application and provide feedback. Ideally, these requests would be made at least two weeks before the application deadline.

Grant Program: Arts Respond Performance Support

This program provides professional artist fees to Texas nonprofits, schools, colleges, and units of government for hiring an artist from the [Texas Touring Roster](#) to do a performance. These applications are funded based on a percentage of contracted fees.

Activity dates must start: Between June 15, 2026 and August 31, 2026

Application deadline: Midnight on May 1, 2026

Application form: [Online](#)

Resources: [Grant guidelines](#), [contact TCA staff](#), [FAQ](#)

TCA Speaker Series: Creative Approaches to Accessibility

TCA will be holding a free, optional online webinar titled **Creative Approaches to Accessibility**. This event is an opportunity to learn about the ways organizations can better and more easily incorporate accessibility into their work. Celia Hughes from Art Spark Texas, Lisa Scheps from Ground Floor Theatre, and the Kimbell Art Museum's Connie Hatchett Bargainer and Melissa

Sztuk will discuss the ways Art Spark Texas has helped organizations address challenges meeting Accessibility and Disability Act (ADA) requirements in creative ways and how organizations can reimagine accessibility as a part of their work. A question-and-answer session will follow.

The virtual meeting will be on **Thursday, March 26 from 2:00 pm - 3:30 pm Central**. It is open to arts nonprofits, artists, and members of the public.

TCA is excited to feature our speakers, who bring a wealth of information and experience working to meet accessibility needs across Texas:



Celia Hughes, Executive Director at Art Spark Texas, will lead the discussion. Celia Hughes has over 30 years of experience working in the arts and disability field, mainly focused in theater and music as a teacher, producer, artist and administrator. She has designed inclusive arts programs in partnership with public schools, community centers, cultural arts facilities, and disability service organizations in Austin and across Texas.



Connie Hatchett Bargainer is Head of Education at the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, where she collaborates with fellow educators to develop year-round programming and resources that deepen cultural understanding, foster personal creativity, and build community at every stage of life.

Melissa Sztuk is the Community and Bilingual Programs Coordinator at the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, where she regularly leads on- and off-site museum programs that highlight multi-modal learning and dialogue-based engagement to foster community and accessible group learning for all ages, backgrounds, and abilities.



Lisa Scheps is the Founder and Executive Artistic Director of the award-winning Ground Floor Theatre in Austin. She has over fifty years of theater experience and has worked on Broadway, regionally, and internationally.

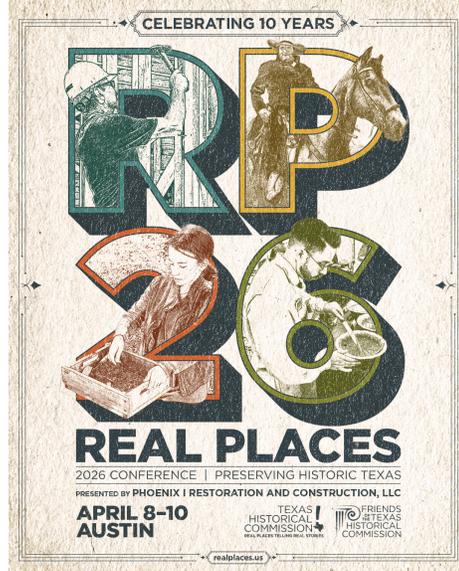
[Register](#) today and mark your calendar! Please note: registration does not guarantee a spot in this event, as spaces are limited. Be quick to join us on the day-of to experience this conversation in real time.

Photos: Connie Hatchett Bargainer and Melissa Sztuk by Robert LaPrelle; Lisa Scheps by John Davidson

Real Places 2026

TCA is a member of a group of State agencies that work together under a memorandum of understanding to promote tourism. One of our partner agencies, the Texas Historical Commission, is holding a conference soon that will address the needs of museums and other cultural venues.

The Texas Historical Commission's Real Places 2026 conference will take place both virtually and in person in Austin, April 8-10. Presented by the Friends of the Texas Historical Commission in partnership with Phoenix I Restoration and Construction, LLC, Real Places is the premier historic preservation and heritage tourism event in the Lone Star State, where anyone interested in protecting our past can work directly with industry-leading experts to learn practical, actionable solutions they can apply in their community.



The packed schedule features more than 50 workshops, tours, and sessions; over 100 expert speakers from across Texas and the U.S.; several keynote presentations; and a number of fun networking events. Recordings will be available to all attendees, whether joining online or in person, so you'll be able to watch the great presentations you missed due to concurrent sessions. Learn more and sign up at realplaces.us.

Apply to Be a TCA Grant Evaluator

Each year, TCA invites roughly 200 Texans to serve as peer reviewers of the grant applications we receive. We are grateful to these members of our arts field who donate their time and knowledge to our panel review process and assess the quality of grant applications. The peer review process is central to the Commission's efforts to maintain an accountable, accessible awards system for the State of Texas.

If you would like insight into the grant evaluation process, we invite you to nominate yourself to serve on a panel. TCA is not able to pay for this work, but it will allow you to gain experience as a grant evaluator, see how other organizations present their programs and challenges, and ensure that TCA grant decisions can be made—we really can't do this without you. Nominations are accepted year-round and can be made [here](#).

Panels can be held online or in person in Austin. TCA reimburses for travel and hotel costs for in-person meetings. For online panels, TCA assigns reviewers no more than 25 grant applications to help keep the workload reasonable. **Evaluators can also be grant applicants**—TCA excludes evaluators from reviewing and scoring an application that they submitted or have any other conflict of interest with.

Support Texas Arts with the *State of the Arts* License Plate

TCA's chic black-and-silver *State of the Arts* minimalist design license plate is available to order at <https://www.myplates.com/go/arts>. This plate design can go on a passenger car, motorcycle, trailer, or private bus (attention, Texas bands!). TCA will receive a portion of the sales of the plate. Note that this plate is part of MyPlates' "Lone Star Series," but only the *State of the Arts* plate



supports TCA. There is a price break for those ordering their plate for multiple years. Make a long-term commitment to the arts!

TCA Rural Tours Bring More Arts to Underserved Areas

In our continuing efforts to provide more quality performances and arts opportunities to rural areas of the state, TCA has selected five Texas Touring Roster artists and groups to provide free performances in rural counties during the spring. Each artist or group provides five performances in an assigned area, and the performances are hosted by local nonprofits, units of government, or schools. TCA pays each artist a flat fee for the performances directly, eliminating costs to host organizations. Hosts are reminded that any Texas nonprofit or unit of government, including a school or library, is eligible to apply for a Performance Support grant for up to half of a Texas Touring Roster artist's fee.



This month, we are excited to share performances occurring in Wharton, Pecos, and Reeves counties.

Congressionally-recognized dance group **Nia's Daughters Movement Collective** is a multigenerational group of like-minded Black women dance and multidisciplinary artists with the mission to create and support art and wellness initiatives through the lens of Black women and girls. On March 12, Nia's Daughters will be delighting audiences in Wharton County with two interactive story time performances. Audiences are welcome to attend a 2 PM performance at the main branch of the Wharton County Library, as well as a 4 PM performance at the El Campo Branch Library.



On March 19 and 20, internationally known and award-winning storyteller/puppeteer/ventriloquist **Margaret Clauder** will be bringing her original program "Let's Read with THE Bookworm" to Pecos and Reeves counties. Students at Pecos Headstart and Austin Elementary School in Reeves County will enjoy this literacy-focused program on March 19. Audiences at Alamo Elementary School in Pecos County will experience performances on March 20.

If you are nearby, we hope you'll enjoy these free performances! We'll have more spring performances to share in our April newsletter. Special thanks to the fantastic artists conducting rural tours on behalf of TCA and to their host organizations.

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