



# Aloud and proud!

Palesa Hlongwane (Presentation, Tralee winner of the Junior National Title Poetry Aloud Award) and Majella Votta (Mercy Mounthawk, Tralee winner of the Senior Category Award and Overall winner of the Seamus Heaney Poetry Aloud Award) with their teachers l-r: Joanna O'Flynn and Palesa Hlongwane (Presentation) with Majella Votta and Janette Condon (Mercy Mounthawk).

## Students achieve top awards for spoken poetry

TWO TRALEE students have won national awards for their poetry speaking skills at a prestigious event in Dublin. Palesa Hlongwane from Presentation Secondary School and Majella Votta of Mercy Mounthawk Secondary School won the Junior and Senior categories respectively at the 'Poetry Aloud' competition in the National Library of Ireland (NLI) on Friday last.

BY SIMON BOURKE

And, not content with being declared winner in the senior category, Majella was also chosen as overall winner of the competition. She was awarded the Seamus Heaney Poetry Aloud Award, beating over 1,700 entries from 143 schools across the country.

An annual poetry speaking competition for post-primary school students, Poetry Aloud was set up in 2007 to celebrate and preserve the art of poetry speaking among young people in Ireland.

Majella's winning recit-

al was a fitting one, 'The Rain Stick' by Seamus Heaney, in which Heaney describes the 'music' produced by a cactus stalk.

Commenting on Majella's win, her tutor Janette Condon said: "I am very proud of Majella. She was a pleasure to work with and put 100% commitment into preparing for the competition."

In addition to her award, Majella received €300 for herself and €300 in book tokens for her school's library.

Palesa read 'May' by Kerry Hardie and, according to her teacher, Joanna O'Flynn, Palesa's recital

resonated with the judges. "She spoke with élan, tenderness and has a distinctive voice. She loved what she was doing and that shone through," said Joanna.

Originally from Cape Town in South Africa, Palesa was described as an "exceptional young girl with a natural flair for poetry", by Joanna who said the whole school was "ecstatic" about the victory. Palesa also won €300 in book tokens for the Presentation Secondary School library.

Speaking at the final, Brid O'Sullivan of the NLI's Learning and Outreach Department said: "This competition has been a highlight in the National Library of Ireland calendar for more than a decade. We keep the manuscripts of some of Ireland's greatest poets in our collections, and it is wonderful to hear their works recited with such emotion and skill during the Poetry Aloud competition each year."