



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**December 9, 2022**

## **Olaoluwakiitan Adedeji Named First Lexington Youth Poet Laureate**

**Lexington, KY** – On December 3, the four finalists for the Lexington, Kentucky Youth Poet Laureate title performed for judges at a commencement ceremony at the Carnegie Center for Literacy and Learning. Olaoluwakiitan (Kiitan) Adedeji, 14, Lafayette High School, has been chosen as the inaugural 2022 Lexington Youth Poet Laureate (YPL) by a panel of esteemed judges, that included the current Kentucky Poet Laureate Crystal Wilkinson.

The three remaining finalists, Aileen Khosravi, Lillian Bramble, and Sophie Watson, will serve as official ambassadors to the City’s historic and vibrant cultures of poetry and literature, using their positions to promote local writers and the transformative qualities of poetry and the written word.

The National YPL identifies, celebrates, and honors teen poets who exhibit a commitment to not just artistic excellence but also civic engagement, youth leadership, and social justice. YPL collaborates with local youth literary arts organizations and leading national literary organizations. “The new YPL program offers Lexington youth the opportunity to use their poetry to engage the community and affect change in a powerful way,” said Jamari Turner, Lexington Youth Poet Laureate Program Coordinator, “Adedeji was chosen for her community activism and her distinctive and unique poetic voice. She will ably represent the perspective of the youth in our city.”

Adedeji said, “I have found that one of the best ways to capture my experiences is through poetry. By reading other black Kentucky poets, like Crystal Wilkinson and Bernard Clay, I can set a standard for how I want to use poetry to express my identity. With poetry, I can find the heart of something and with each poem, I can discover something new within my black experience.”

**See Poem Below, by Kiitan Adedeji.**

### ***The Cage***

To them,

my hair had grown out

off the top of my head

and used its tight coils  
to build a cage around me.  
Making an exotic animal  
kept in a cage  
thousands of miles away from its home.  
They reach into the depths of my cage  
to touch my coils  
for a feel of my exoticness.  
I had never built my cage  
only living in it.  
Unable to muster the courage  
to move the image away from their minds  
I'd let them examine me as a specimen  
I was exotic,  
because every time I looked outside of my cage  
I saw carbon copies  
pale people looking at me, mouth agape  
as I let them claw through my fur  
tarnishing myself with it

**For press inquiries and booking please contact:**

Jamari Turner, Youth Outreach & Programming Director  
Lexington Youth Poet Laureate Program Coordinator

(859) 254-4175, ext. 28

Jamari@CarnegieCenterLex.org

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**More About the National Youth Poet Laureate Program**

Founded in 2008, the National Youth Poet Laureate Program identifies and celebrates teen poets who exhibit a commitment to artistic excellence, civic engagement, youth leadership and social justice. Learn more at <http://www.youthlaureate.org>

**More About the Carnegie Center for Literacy and Learning**

The Carnegie Center for Literacy & Learning is a 501(c)(3) non-profit educational and community center devoted to helping all citizens improve their quality of life through education and expression. Our open-door policy invites people young and old to learn something new. We

offer seasonal classes in writing, publishing, and languages; tutoring for students grades K-12; vibrant youth and family programs and exhibits; readings from established authors and local literary icons; and other arts-related events designed to encourage among Central Kentuckians an appreciation for learning and the arts. Learn more at [CarnegieCenterLex.org](http://CarnegieCenterLex.org).

### **More About Urban Word**

Urban Word is an award-winning youth literary arts and youth development organization that collaborates with local youth literary arts organizations across the country to provide uncensored platforms for youth voice. It is championed by the leading national literary organizations, including the President's Committee on the Arts & Humanities, the Academy of American Poets, Poetry Society of America, PEN Center USA, Cave Canem, and the Library of Congress.