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PRESS RELEASE: Zoya Abbas Named 2024 Lexington Youth Poet Laureate

Lexington, KY (February 8, 2024)—On February 2, the finalists for the Lexington, Kentucky Youth Poet Laureate title, Zoya Abbas, Eva Alcaraz-Monje, Reyna Radhakrishnan, Sophie Watson, and Nina Tay, shared their work with friends, family, and members of the public during a commencement ceremony at the Carnegie Center for Literacy and Learning. Zoya Abbas, 18, Lafayette High School, was named the 2024 Lexington Youth Poet Laureate (LYPL) by a panel of judges, Katerina Stoykova, Sean L. Corbin, and Maddie Mitchell.

The National Youth Poet Laureate (NYPL) identifies, celebrates, and honors teen poets who exhibit a commitment to artistic excellence, civic engagement, youth leadership, and social justice. In accordance with that mission, “The Lexington Youth Poet Laureate program was designed to inspire others to share their story and to make an impact in their community,” said Lexington Youth Poet Laureate Program Coordinator Jonathan Hall, “Zoya is the perfect person to continue the work Olaoluwakiitan Adedeji (the 2023 LYPL) started. I can't wait to see what she will accomplish in the role.”

The proud parents of the new youth poet laureate, Amrita & Zahir Abbas, “ensured Zoya was always surrounded by books and was exposed to multiple art forms be it through music, writing or photography. Added to this, her diverse cultural experiences through travel and living in multiple countries ensured the development of her keen observation skills and deep empathetic outlook which reflects in her poetry.”

“From the day I was born, I have been given two names. One is the name I received from my parents. The second I gave myself when I began my journey as a writer. Being a poet is a title I have given myself, said Zoya, “it is the title that guides my principles, my faith and my understanding of the world around me. Being Lexington’s Youth Poet Laureate is an honor and a privilege that I am truly so grateful for. I hope through the duration of my tenure, I am able to guide the people around me to find the poet in themselves.”

See Poem Below, by Zoya Abbas.

“Burn”

Burn like the soils of my homeland

Burn like my skin when I would walk outside in July

Ashes in the sky

Pollution and smoke

Remnants of the celebration of the Festival of Lights

Ashes on a pyre

First,

I'm the first daughter to come to America

I'll be the first to graduate from an American college

First, a child of my motherland

Then, me.