

## Poems with a purpose at annual Louder Than a Bomb slam festival

Poetry club takes on societal issues with an artistic flair

by Eleanor Kaplan

“The point is not the points, the point is the poetry.” This attitude is what permeates the annual Chicago-area high-school poetry slam Louder Than a Bomb.

This year, many performers chose to use their literary talents to tackle larger societal issues in their poems.

Common topics included the #MeToo movement, gun violence, LGBTQ issues, undocumented immigrants, and equality in general.

“One of the great things about Louder Than a Bomb is that it is a good barometer of what larger issues society is facing,” said sponsor and English teacher John O’Connor.

New Trier Poetry Club won the second preliminary bout this year, but did not advance into the Sweet 16. While the team did go further in the competition than in previous years, club members focused on how the experience of sharing their poetry was the most rewarding aspect.

Junior co-head Lila Formicola, who has performed at Louder Than a Bomb for two years, said, “It enables me to share my feelings in an open



Sophomore Xariah Chase representing New Trier as she delivers a powerful performance | Perez

environment where I feel safe and supported.”

Senior Alexia Raucci performed an individual piece about the power that love and compassion can have on equality.

“My goal is to always write my truth and to make sure it’s heard,” Raucci said.

“Often times, students and young people can feel as if their voices are being overlooked. Poetry can be an outlet for expressing these ideas,” said senior José Chavez. “We start forming very strong opinions and point of views that go unnoticed, so we put it all in poetry.”

Compared to previous years, more poems had an underlying

seriousness that was not present before, noted O’Connor.

“While there always are some jokey and just-for-fun poems, the number of them seems to have decreased this year,” he said.

Chavez felt that the majority of the poems performed at LTAB were inspired by a current event or injustice.

This year the group poem, performed by four Poetry Club members, focused on the negative effects of romanticizing mental illnesses. The poem emphasized the importance of recognizing and taking mental illness seriously.

Louder Than a Bomb hosted over 1,200 poets this year as well as

more than 3,000 audience members at the 90 different events held. These included the classic poetry slams, open mic nights, and musical performances.

New Trier has been competing in Louder Than a Bomb since 2008 when O’Connor’s daughter, Allison, discovered the event and got Poetry Club involved.

The first time Poetry Club went to the event they only had three poets. This year, nine members performed out of the fifteen total in the club. The four-team round final competition was held on Mar. 18 at Roosevelt University.

Slam poetry has developed over the past few years, and has been

parodied in movies such as 22 Jump Street. The satires portray slam poetry as many choppy sentence fragments, and lots of yelling. While this is an exaggeration, O’Connor noted how real slam poetry does often fit in with these preconceptions.

“I would like to see people move away from that set form, rebel against that form in the future,” he said.

Many of the performances this year, because of their focus on serious social issues, were more personal and somber.

“Especially considering the climate were in, the art that is performed truly captures the spirit of Louder Than a Bomb and the intensity of the artists,” Formicola added.

Poetry has become a way for teens especially to discuss important topics that may not be suited to everyday small talk, as is evident in Louder Than a Bomb this year.

By being such a creative art form, poets can express their thoughts on controversial matters, adding in personal elements and raising thought-provoking questions.

“When it comes to writing and performing poetry, my number one goal is to leave the audience with a metaphorical seed—an idea,” Chavez said. “The audience can take that seed and nurture it, watch it grow, and share what they have made with someone else.”

## Varsity debate excels at state championships

Multiple debaters advance into elimination rounds, win distinctions

by Stephanie Kim

While much of New Trier’s student body was celebrating St. Patrick’s Day on Saturday, Mar. 17, the New Trier Speech and Debate team was competing against Illinois’ best debaters at the IHSA Varsity State Championship in Springfield, Illinois.

New Trier’s team competed across all four categories of debate: Policy, Congressional, Public Forum, and Lincoln-Douglas. They had many top performances across these categories.

Of the policy debaters, juniors Hannah Kadin and Josie Ewing placed in the Final Four of the semifinals before being eliminated 2 – 1, while juniors Jack Altman and Roland Kim advanced to the Elite Eight and also finished on a 2–1.

This year, the policy debate topic was whether the United States government should increase funding and/or regulations for public education.

In Congressional Debate, sophomore Max Rosen came in 7th place, while junior Will Thornton advanced to the Sweet 16 octofinals for Lincoln-Douglas debate, earning 9th place. Thornton was also named to the Illinois All-State Debate Team for Lincoln-Douglas, as did Ewing for Policy.

While the debaters had high hopes going into the tournament, they definitely felt the intensity of the competition they would be facing.

“The atmosphere at the state tournament was super exciting and competitive because everyone there has put in a lot of preparation and looked to perform as well as possible,” said Kadin.

Kim agreed that there was a mix of both excitement and anxiety as the debaters braced themselves to



Teddy Kamin, Will Naviaux, Max Rosen, Ben Newcomb, and Frank Zawrazky feeling confident after state | Debate

compete.

“The tourney was pretty tense, just because so many schools across the state take this tournament very seriously and prepare with everything they have.”

“At the same time, it was also fun because of all the time you had to talk to friends from other schools and hang out when not debating,” added Kin.

Despite the high level of competition from teams such as Glenbrook or Niles, New Trier’s debate program prepared their debaters with a combination of hard training and strong effort from both the debaters and the coaches.

“New Trier Debate helped us prepare for the tournament by discussing common arguments made on both sides regarding education policy and how to make those arguments clear and concise to a judge who’s evaluating the round,” said Kim.

Speech and Debate teacher Aaron Vinson noted that not only were the debaters’ preparation the culmination of a lot of effort, it was also well thought-out and emphasized strategy and smart arguments.

“In Lincoln-Douglas and Public Forum, it’s a little bit different from other events because the topics change frequently, so a lot of what we work on is teaching [the

debaters] the process of making a quality argument that can apply to every topic,” said Vinson. “We talk about how to research, how to write arguments, responding to arguments, good questions to ask their opponents — it’s very skill-focused.”

Kadin reflected the level of preparedness that the debaters had achieved simply through preparing for other tournaments and, like Kim, examining specific arguments.

“We have been prepping for various tournaments throughout the season on the national circuit that were just as or even more competitive than state, so we felt very ready to compete overall,” said Kadin. “Over the past couple weeks, we began to look at the arguments specific teams going to Illinois State read and prepared for them, as well as have practice debates after school.”

What makes New Trier’s performance even more notable at this state championship was the number of debaters who placed that were not seniors, as they typically are.

“[At] a tournament like the state championship, that’s a tournament that usually only seniors are doing really well at. For us to have a strong showing by a lot of our underclassmen demonstrates that we’re basically a threat to win any tournament,” said Speech and Debate teacher David

Weston.

The state championship is nowhere near the end of the debaters’ goals, as the infamous Tournament of Champions looms in the near future, which many debaters hope to attend and excel at.

“My biggest goal for the season was to qualify for the Tournament of Champions at the end of the year,” explained Kadin. “We hear back about whether or not we will be able to compete at the end of this month. On top of that, my goals are to just continue working hard and doing prep so that next season goes even better.”

No matter what awards and accolades the New Trier debaters garner, though, the most important part of the debate program for the Speech and Debate teachers is whether or not the debaters truly enjoy their experience and learn something from it.

“One of the core beliefs of our debate program is that we want students to access debate in a way that fits their interest. For some students, they want to be top competitors in the country. Other students want to dabble a little bit in debate because it’s academically fun and challenging,” said Weston. “Our goals are to help kids achieve their goals.”

## Japan Bowl

Students head to D.C. after earning first place at Japan Bowl

by Katie Kim

For the third time since the competition began four years ago, NT students are heading to the National Japan Bowl in Washington, D.C., after taking first place at the Illinois Japan Bowl on Mar. 10 at North Central College in Naperville.

The Illinois Japan Bowl involves 47 teams of second, third, and fourth-year high school Japanese students competing in academic competitions that tested mastery of language, culture, history, geography, arts, current events, and pop culture.

Seniors Colleen Furth, Elliot Jung-Beceman, and Josh Lariosa won first place in the Level 4 category. The students were coached by Japanese teacher Naomi Suzuki, known by her students as Suzuki Sensei, who leads the Japanese program at New Trier. The team met on several occasions during and after school to prepare for the competition.

Now, the team is studying for the National Japan Bowl Competition that will take place in the nation’s capital on Apr. 12 and 13, at the same time as Washington’s popular annual Sakura Matsuri Japanese Street Festival, which is a part of the famous National Cherry Blossom Festival.

Japan America Society of Chicago is covering the expenses of the team. At the National Japan Bowl, the team will compete against schools from around the country.

In 2016, the New Trier team captured 5th place trophies at the National Japan Bowl. This year’s team is looking forward to the opportunity to meet Japanese students from around the country, and take in the sights, tastes, and sounds from the Cherry Blossom Festival along the Tidal Basin.