



**FOR RELEASE:**

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Photos located [here](#).

**The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts**  
announces the

**Winners of the 2023  
VSA Playwright Discovery Competition  
Recognizing Excellence in Young Playwrights with Disabilities**

**Six Young Playwrights from California, Nevada, New York, and Washington  
Participated in a Weekend of Pre-Professional Activities at the  
Kennedy Center, April 20–22, 2023**

(WASHINGTON)—Six young playwrights from California, Nevada, New York, and Washington have been selected as the winners of the 2023 VSA Playwright Discovery Competition, a Jean Kennedy Smith Arts and Disability program of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. The competition challenges high school-aged writers with disabilities to create short plays based on their own experiences and observations by crafting fictional characters and settings, or choosing to write metaphorically or abstractly. Students’ scripts are adjudicated by a panel of industry professionals.

The award recipients and winning plays are:

<b>PLAYWRIGHT(S)</b>	<b>PLAY</b>	<b>HOMETOWN</b>
<b>Chase Kim and Katie Wang</b>	<i>One Moment , Please</i>	Henderson, Nevada & Yorba Linda, California
<b>Emily Maremont</b>	<i>Lesson Plans</i>	San Francisco, California
<b>Jane Palladino</b>	<i>Jesus Loves You</i>	San Mateo, California

**Francesca Smith**

*The Impaired and The Ignorant*

Cicero, New York

**Jaiden Thompson**

*SUPERNOVA*

Seattle, Washington

The six winning playwrights of the competition traveled to Washington, D.C. to participate in a weekend of pre-professional activities at the Kennedy Center alongside the annual Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival, April 20–23. In advance of the weekend’s activities, the winning playwrights gathered virtually in March for a half-day script reading with local D.C. actors and a group feedback session. Each playwright then received a one-hour virtual dramaturgy session with writer, actress, producer, and this year’s program dramaturg Mieko Gavia to fine-tune and revise their scripts.

New to the program this year, the playwrights engaged with Washington, D.C.-area professional designers in an effort to model the process of new play development. Designers presented their concepts to the playwrights for feedback (costume, lighting, set, sound). In addition, a reading of revised scripts took place with the same actors who participated in the virtual session last month.

The young playwrights also engaged with seasoned professional playwrights, directors, and actors to refine their scripts and further develop their playwriting skills. Mentors and noted industry panelists included **Claudia Alick, Brian Balcom, A.A. Brenner, Monique (aka MoMo) Holt, Regan Linton, Talleri McRae, Diane Nutting,** and program dramaturg **Mieko Gavia.**

“I am in awe of the ability of these young writers with disabilities to write such compelling stories through the art of play writing,” said **Betty Siegel,** Director of Accessibility and VSA at the Kennedy Center. “To see them blossom, as they explore the disability experience and identity in a safe place with their peers, demonstrates the power of the arts. And we are thrilled to have supported them in their creative development.”

### **2023 VSA Playwright Discovery Competition Winners**

**Chase Kim (*One Moment, Please*)** is a sophomore at Yorba Linda High School in Orange County, California. From a young age, he has loved to read and write and strives to use his creativity as a conduit for his self-expression and ideas. In addition to being an avid writer, Kim is also involved in Speech and Debate at his school. He has won several local tournaments for Congressional Debate and placed as a semi-finalist at the California High School Speech Association Championship as a ninth grader. In his free time, he loves to cook and explore different cultures through cuisine.

**Emily Maremont (*Lesson Plans*)** is a sophomore at University High School in San Francisco, California. Her fiction and dramatic writing have been recognized by the National YoungArts

Foundation and the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards. Her play *The Mitten* was a winner in PlayGround's 14th Annual Young Playwrights Project. She is a Fiction and Nonfiction editor at *jGirls+ Magazine*. In her spare time, she volunteers with ENgin, an organization that pairs Ukrainian youth with English speakers for free online conversation practice. She is also a member of the a cappella group at her school.

**Jane Palladino (*Jesus Loves You*)** is a senior in high school and is from the San Francisco Bay Area. She is honored to have received the 2023 VSA Playwright Discovery Program Award. This fall, Palladino will begin her freshman year at American University, studying musical theater. Not only does she love writing, but she loves improv and the performing aspect of theater. She would love to thank her mom, her friends, her family, and her mentors for always supporting her.

**Francesca Smith (*The Impaired and The Ignorant*)** is a junior at Bishop Grimes High School from Cicero, New York. She has performed in a number of Bishop Grimes High School chorus and musical productions. Smith is a member of the varsity tennis team. She is an active member on the Young Adult Council at Syracuse Stage. She developed a passion for the performing arts in fourth grade and starred in her first play at the age of 11. Her hobbies include reading and writing. She resides in Cicero with her three brothers, mother, father, and two faithful fur brothers. She aspires to become a director and screenwriter.

**Jaiden Thompson (*SUPERNOVA*)** is a Black American writer from Seattle, Washington. Their poems are published in multiple literary magazines including *Diode*, *per happened*, and *Lumiere Review*, among others. Outside of writing, they are an actor, their latest roles having been Amos in *Chicago* and Orcus in *She Kills Monsters* at Forest Ridge School.

**Katie Wang (*One Moment, Please*)** is a sophomore at Coronado High School in Henderson, Nevada. She believes that art in all its forms (whether visual, written, or through performance) is one of the best ways to express oneself freely. Wang is also an active participant in the robust Theater Program at her high school. She is continuously pushing herself out of her comfort zone and her artwork titled *Heart Balloon* was selected for the Mosaics Exhibition at the Government Center Rotunda Gallery in downtown Las Vegas. In her free time, she likes to read, watch musicals, and spend time with her family and her dog Sadie.

#### **About The Office of Accessibility and VSA**

The Kennedy Center has been at the forefront of making the performing arts accessible to persons with disabilities. Serving the international disability and arts community, the Office of Accessibility and VSA, a Jean Kennedy Smith Arts and Disability program, provides opportunities for people with disabilities of all ages across the globe to learn through, participate in, and enjoy the arts. The Office focuses its efforts on cultural access for patrons and visitors with disabilities; arts and special education initiatives; professional development for educators and cultural administrators; and career opportunities in the arts for people with disabilities. For more information, please visit <http://education.kennedy-center.org/education/#Access>.

#### **About Education at the Kennedy Center**

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts sets a national standard for arts learning. Working through model programs and a nationwide network of partners, the nation's cultural center harnesses

the power of the arts to address education challenges, accelerate best practices, and uplift citizen artists. Across all its programs, the Kennedy Center is committed to increasing accessible, inclusive opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to participate in, learn about, and learn through the arts. On September 7, 2019, the Kennedy Center will open the REACH, an immersive arts and learning center with significant space and programming for arts education.

As an essential component of the living memorial to President Kennedy, the Center's Education programs utilize the arts to embrace President Kennedy's ideals of service, justice, freedom, courage, and gratitude. By cultivating the citizen artist in everyone, the Kennedy Center brings the arts and creativity to the center of our lives. For more information, please visit [kennedy-center.org/education/](http://kennedy-center.org/education/).

### **Funding Credits**

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### **PRESS CONTACT:**

Brittany Laeger

(202)416-8445

[balaeger@kennedy-center.org](mailto:balaeger@kennedy-center.org)