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National Book Foundation

## **National Book Foundation, Presenter of the National Book Awards**

**Announces the Winners of its Annual**

**Innovations in Reading Prize:**

*A Southern Baptist Church; a Volunteer-run After-school Tutoring Program; a Text Message Poetry Journal; a Reading Program for Incarcerated Male Teens and an Organization that Unites Military Families through Books*

New York, NY, May 5, 2009 - The Board of the National Book Foundation has awarded its second annual Innovations in Reading Prizes to five organizations that are demonstrating passion, creativity, dedication, and leadership in the service of creating and sustaining a lifelong love of reading within their local community or beyond. The winners are: **826 Valencia**, a volunteer-run after-school tutoring program; *Cellpoems*, an online poetry journal that distributes poetry by established and emerging poets via text messages; **Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop**, a program that uses books and creative writing to empower teenage boys charged and incarcerated as adults; **Mount Olive Baptist Church**, a church that opened a “secular” library; and **United Through Reading**, an organization that provides the opportunity for military families to unite by reading books.

The winners hail from San Francisco, California; Brooklyn, New York; Washington, DC; Hopkins, South Carolina; and San Diego, California. Each winner will receive \$2,500.00 and a framed certificate.

Leslie Shipman, Director of Programs for the National Book Foundation, states, “I’m delighted by the diversity and resourcefulness of this year’s Innovations in Reading Prize winners. From organizations like United Through Reading, which is using books and reading to help keep military families connected, to the Mount Olive Baptist Church community in Hopkins, South Carolina, who’ve overcome their limited access to libraries and bookstores by creating their own library in the church, to *Cellpoems*, a journal that is using technology in a surprising and innovative way to make poetry a part of people’s daily lives, I’m struck once again by the commitment these organizations have shown to keeping reading and the appreciation of literature a healthy and vibrant part of our culture.”

### **The Winners are:**

**826 Valencia:** 826 Valencia is a nonprofit after-school writing and tutoring center located in the Mission District of San Francisco that is dedicated to helping students ages 6-18 improve their writing skills, and to fostering a

lifelong passion for reading and writing. About 65% of the students who attend the free center are from non-English-speaking homes. The Pirate Supply Store in front of the center offers an imaginative gateway for children to view not just reading but learning. Once the children have completed their homework, 826 offers creative daily projects with the assistance of over 1,4000 volunteers, including published authors, magazine founders, filmmakers, and other professionals. Student writing is published in various formats, including, most recently, the collection, *Thanks and Have Fun Running the Country: Kids' Letters to President Obama*, to be distributed nationwide.

**Cellpoems:** *Cellpoems* is a poetry journal distributed via text message and on the Web through which subscribers receive poems of 140 characters or less to their cell phones twice a week. *Cellpoems* has published work by established poets, including Charles Simic, Billy Collins, Kimiko Hahn, Michael Hofmann, and Matthea Harvey, as well as emerging poets, such as Kate Angus, Chris Bakken, and Andrew Zawacki. The goal of the journal is to present “hard-boiled and striking poems,” from the tanka and haiku to the monosonnet, to as many readers as possible. The journal is based in Brooklyn, New York.

**Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop:** Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop uses books and creative writing to empower teenage boys charged and incarcerated at the Washington DC Jail to transform their own lives. The young inmates come from some of the city’s most crime-stricken and impoverished neighborhoods. At 16 and 17 years old, they read, on average, at a fifth-grade level, and most have never completed a book before joining the book club. Free Minds meets weekly at the jail to discuss works of literature, choosing titles that will resonate with the boys’ own experiences. In addition, published authors visit the prison to help strengthen the young inmates’ connection to the books they’re reading.

**Mount Olive Baptist Church:** Mount Olive Baptist is a small church in a rural community in South Carolina where the nearest library branch is 10 miles away. In order to give children more exposure to books, the church membership created their own children's library by going to garage sales and buying books, dictionaries, and a set of encyclopedias. Books are also brought in from Richland County Public Library in Columbia, one of the nation's best libraries. Every week, each child in Sunday School gets to talk about what they are reading. The Church officials are very supportive of the library, and local adults are coming in to re-read books they read as children.

**United Through Reading:** United Through Reading, an organization based in San Diego, California, offers parents who are away from their children the opportunity to be recorded on DVD reading storybooks from more than 220 recording locations around the world. For families separated by military deployments, the Military Program is available on nearly all deployed US Navy ships, on bases and installations around the world, in desert camps in Iraq and Afghanistan, and in more than 70 USO centers worldwide. The Transitions Program makes the same opportunity available for incarcerated parents in local, state, and federal corrections facilities—affecting our nation’s most vulnerable, the children of the incarcerated. The Grandparent Program, the newest program, is currently in pilot stages in San Diego County.

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**The Mission of the National Book Foundation** is to celebrate the best of American literature, to expand its audience, and to enhance the cultural value of good writing in America.

#### **About the National Book Awards**

The nation’s most prestigious literary prize, the National Book Awards has a stellar record of identifying and rewarding

quality writing. In 1950, William Carlos Williams was the first winner in Poetry, the following year William Faulkner was honored, and so on through the years. Many previous Winners of a National Book Award are now firmly established in the canon of American literature. On November 17th, the National Book Awards will be presented in the categories of Fiction, Nonfiction, Poetry, and Young People's Literature.

