



**The Loft Literary Center**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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**The Loft Literary Center Announces Recipients of  
the 2024 McKnight Fellowships for Writers**

**Four Minnesota Poets/Spoken Word Artists and One Children's  
Literature Author Receive \$25,000 Each**

The Loft Literary Center is pleased to announce the recipients of the 2024 McKnight Fellowships for Writers, Loft Awards in Poetry/Spoken Word and Loft Award in Children's Literature (Younger Children). Since 1982, the Loft has partnered with the McKnight Foundation to offer substantial fellowships to Minnesota writers.

The fellowships are judged by prominent American authors and editors, and the winners, all from Minnesota, are awarded \$25,000 each. The judges this year were Mahogany L. Browne in poetry/spoken word and Don Tate in children's literature.

The Loft received 28 qualified applications in children's literature and 65 qualified applications in poetry/spoken word. This year's recipients are children's writer **Catherine Thimmesh** (Eden Prairie) and poets/spoken word artists **Stephani Maari Booker** (Minneapolis), **Sonia Greenfield** (Minneapolis), **Ed Bok Lee** (Minneapolis), and **Aurora Masum-Javed** (Saint Paul).



The honorable mentions in children’s literature are Mary Casanova (International Falls), John Coy (Minneapolis), Colleen Muske (Stillwater), and Laura Salas (Oakdale). The honorable mentions in poetry/spoken word are Katharine Rauk (Minneapolis), Donna Salli (Brainerd), Ollie Schminkey (Saint Paul), and Ryan Vine (Duluth).

## **McKnight Fellowships for Writers, Loft Award in Children's Literature/Children Younger Than Eight: 2024 Recipient**

**Catherine Thimmesh** is an award-winning author, speaker, and creativity educator. Her creative children’s nonfiction titles have won numerous awards, including a New York Times Notable Book and the prestigious Sibert Medal. She is the author of the best-selling book: *GIRLS THINK OF EVERYTHING: Stories of Ingenious Inventions by Women* — which was substantially revised and newly released in 2018. *TEAM MOON: How 400,000 People Landed Apollo 11 on the Moon* won the Sibert Medal, while *CAMP PANDA: Helping Cubs Return to the Wild* was a Sibert Honor book. Her most recent book — a companion to *GIRLS THINK OF EVERYTHING* — is *GIRLS SOLVE EVERYTHING: Stories of Women Entrepreneurs Building a Better World* (focusing on stories of women social entrepreneurs). You can watch her discuss the importance of creativity in her TEDx talk: “Creativity in the Classroom (in 5 minutes or less)” on YouTube, or Catherine’s website. She has a forthcoming book for children to be published in Spring 2025. Catherine lives and works in Eden Prairie, Minnesota. [www.catherinethimmesh.com](http://www.catherinethimmesh.com)

## **McKnight Fellowships for Writers, Loft Award in Poetry/Spoken Word: 2024 Recipients**

**Stephani Maari Booker** (she/her/hers) of Minneapolis, Minnesota, writes works for the page and for performance in which she wrestles with her multiple marginalized identities: Black, lesbian, lower-class, nerdy and sexy. She is a winner of the 2022 Environmental (In)justice in Mni Sóta Maḵoḵe Storytelling Contest held by *Saint Paul Almanac* and the University of St. Thomas Sustainable Communities



Partnership and a recipient of a 2024 Minnesota State Arts Board Creative Individuals Grant. The author of *Secret Insurrection: Stories from a Novel of a Future Time* (Athena Persephoni Publications, 2018), Stephani has creative work in journals such as *St. Paul Almanac*, *Astral Waters Review*, *Minnesota Women's Press*, *Wanderlust*, *Unfit to Print*, *Rigorous*, *Aphelion Webzine*, *Lavender Review*, and *Serendipity*. Anthologies and collections that feature her work include *These Black Bodies Are...A Blacklandia Anthology* (Inlandia Institute, 2023), *Queer Voices: Poetry, Prose, and Pride* (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2019), and *Queenies, Fades, Blunts: A Zine* (The Lonely Londoners, 2014). She has also performed most recently for Power to the People Stage at Twin Cities Pride, presented by RARE Productions; MN POC Pride; "Controlled Burn - Queer Performance for a World on Fire!" presented by 20% Theatre Company at Phoenix Theater; and "Revolutionary Jetpacks: Reclaiming the Future(s)" presented by Patrick's Cabaret at Strike Theater. For more information about Stephani's work, go to [www.athenapersephoni.com](http://www.athenapersephoni.com).

**Sonia Greenfield** (she/they) is the author of *All Possible Histories* (Riot in Your Throat); *Helen of Troy is High AF* (Harbor Editions); *Letdown* (White Pine Press), *American Parable* (Autumn House) and *Boy with a Halo at the Farmer's Market* (Codhill Press). Her work has appeared in the 2018 and 2010 *Best American Poetry*, *Southern Review*, *Willow Springs* and elsewhere. She lives with her family in Minneapolis where she teaches at Normandale College, edits the *Rise Up Review*, and advocates for both neurodiversity and the decentering of the cis/het white hegemony.

**Ed Bok Lee** is the author of three books of poetry and prose, including *Whorled* and *Mitochondrial Night*, as well as numerous short stories, plays, and essays. Honors include an American Book Award, an Asian American Literary Award (Members' Choice Award), a PEN/Open Book Award, and a Minnesota Book Award. As a translator, he is a recipient of the 49th Modern Korean Literature Translation Grand Prize in Poetry. Lee attended kindergarten in Seoul, and university in the US, South Korea, and Central Asia. He teaches at Metro State University, and for over two decades has also taught poetry in youth centers, prisons, libraries, and many other programs around the nation and beyond.



**Aurora Masum-Javed** is a poet, educator, and writing coach. A former public school teacher, she holds an MFA from Cornell University. Her work can be found in various journals including *Nimrod*, *Aster(ix)*, *Winter Tangerine*, and *Frontier*. She has received fellowships from places such as MacDowell, Millay Arts, Civitella Ranieri, Tin House, and Kundiman. A recent Philip Roth Resident and Hub City Writer in Residence, she is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor at Macalester College and is working on her first collection of poems.

## McKnight Award Judging

McKnight Award judges were selected in the fall of 2023. The identities of the judges are not known to the applicants during the application process, and applicant identities are kept confidential from the judges until they make their selections.

## 2024 Children's Literature Judge

**Don Tate** is an award-winning illustrator of numerous critically acclaimed books for children, including *Swish! The Slam-Dunking*, *Alley-Ooping*, *High-Flying Harlem Globetrotters*, *No Small Potatoes: Junios G. Groves and His Kingdom in Kansas*, [\*Whoosh! Lonnie Johnson's Super-Soaking Stream of Inventions\*](#), [\*Hope's Gift\*](#), and many others.

He is also an award-winning author. Some of his books for children include: *Jerry Changed The Game: How Engineer Jerry Lawson Revolutionized Video Games Forever*, *William Still and His Freedom Stories: Father of the Underground Railroad*, [\*Strong As Sandow: How Eugen Sandow Became The Strongest Man on Earth\*](#), [\*Poet: The Remarkable Story of George Moses Horton\*](#), and [\*It Jes' Happened: When Bill Traylor Started To Draw\*](#).

Don is a founding host of the [The Brown Bookshelf](#) –a blog dedicated to books for African American young readers; and a member of the #WeNeedDiverseBooks



campaign, created to address the lack of diverse, non-majority narratives in children's literature. He lives in Austin, Texas, with his family.

## **2024 Poetry/Spoken Word Judge**

**Mahogany L. Browne**, selected as Kennedy Center's Next 50 and Wesleyan's 2022-23 Distinguished Writer-in-Residence, is the Executive Director of JustMedia, Artistic Director of Urban Word, a writer, playwright, organizer, & educator. Browne has received fellowships from Arts for Justice, Air Serenbe, Cave Canem, Poets House, Mellon Research & Rauschenberg. She is the author of recent works: *Vinyl Moon*, *Chlorine Sky* (optioned for a play by Steppenwolf Theater), *Woke: A Young Poets Call to Justice*, *Woke Baby*, & *Black Girl Magic*. Founder of the diverse lit initiative Woke Baby Book Fair, Browne's latest poetry collection *Chrome Valley* is a promissory note to survival and available from Norton. She drinks coffee while living in Brooklyn, NY. She is the first ever poet-in-residence at Lincoln Center.

## **About the McKnight Fellowships for Writers**

Now in its 43rd year, the McKnight Fellowships for Writers provide Minnesota writers of demonstrated ability with an opportunity to work on their writing for a concentrated period of time. Five \$25,000 fellowships are awarded. One Award in Children's Literature alternates annually between writers for children under the age of eight and writers for older readers. Four fellowships alternate annually between writers of poetry/spoken word poetry and writers of creative prose. Writers must have either published a book in the genre in which they are applying, have been featured as a performer for a significant amount of readings and performances, or have a significant number of publications in literary magazines. The McKnight Fellowships for Writers administered by the Loft are supported by the McKnight Foundation.

Previous McKnight recipients are too numerous to list, but they include Heid E. Erdrich, Taiyon Coleman, Robert Bly, Patricia Hampl, Margaret Hasse, Jim Moore,



Sun Yung Shin, Cary Waterman, Sandra Benitez, Deborah Keenan, Jack El-Hai, Leslie Adrienne Miller, Patricia Weaver Francisco, Barrie Jean Borich, Lorna Landvik, Kate DiCamillo, Molly Beth Griffin, Danez Smith, Kelly Barnhill, Ray Gonzalez, Dobby Gibson, Donte Collins, Heather Bouwman, Khary Jackson, David Mura, Shannon Gibney, and Anne Ursu.

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*Started in 1974, The Loft Literary Center is one of the nation's leading independent literary centers. The Loft advances the power of writers and readers to craft and share stories, to create and celebrate connections, and to build just, life-sustaining communities. Learn more: [loft.org](http://loft.org)*